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Villiers Lucas.



CAPTAIN SHANNON

FIFTIETH THOUSAND.

THE CHILD, THE WISE MAN, AND THE DEVIL.

SOME OPINIONS.

The Bishop of London says :—" It puts with much imaginative force and beauty the central points in the relation of Christianity to life."

The Rev. Dr. John Clifford says :—" Magnificent as the offspring of fancy, it is mightiest as the product of faith. There is not a false note in it. It rings with sincerity. Figures crowd its pages in pleasantest setting, like flowers in a sunlit landscape, but it is the blending of the forces of genius and faith which charms and binds men, and makes the booklet immortal."

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"BY ORDER.—CAPTAIN SHANNON."

Captain Shannon.]

[Frontispiece.

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1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 277, 1996, 1031-1032.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

FIFTIETH THOUSAND.

GOD AND THE ANT.

Long 8vo, Sewed 1s.

WARD, LOCK & COMPANY, LTD.

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To
LADY SETON
SINCEREST OF FRIENDS
MOST HOSPITABLE OF HOSTESSES

CAPTAIN SHANNON



CHAPTER I

WHO IS "CAPTAIN SHANNON"?

THE year 189— will be memorable for the perpetration, in England and in Ireland, of a series of infamous outrages and diabolical murders. That they had one common origin was clear from the fact that on the scene of each crime the same inscription was found. This inscription, which was sometimes scrawled in plain rough capitals upon a piece of paper, pinned to the body of a victim, and at other times was rudely chalked in similar lettering upon a door or wall, ran as follows:—

"BY ORDER, CAPTAIN SHANNON."

Who Captain Shannon was, the police had failed entirely to discover, although the counties in which the crimes occurred were scoured from end to end, and every person who was known to have been in the neighbourhood was subjected to the severest examination. That some,

who were so examined, knew more than they would tell, there was reason to believe; but so dreaded was the miscreant's name, and so swift and terrible had been the fate of those who, in the past, had incurred his vengeance, that neither offers of reward nor threats of punishment could elicit information which might lead to his arrest.

But when the conspirators carried the war into the enemy's country, and successfully accomplished the peculiarly daring crime which wrecked the police headquarters at New Scotland Yard, the indignation of the public knew no bounds. If the emissaries of Captain Shannon could successfully convey an infernal machine into New Scotland Yard itself, the whole community was—so it was argued—at the mercy of a band of murderers.

The scene in the House of Commons on the night following the outrage was one of great excitement. The Chief Secretary for Ireland declared, in a memorable speech, that the purpose of the crime was to terrorise and to intimidate. No loyal English or Irish citizen would, he was sure, be deterred from doing his duty by such infamous acts; but that they had to deal with murderers of the most determined type could not be doubted. The whole conspiracy was, in his opinion, the work of some half-dozen assassins, who were probably the tools of the

monster calling himself "Captain Shannon," in whose too fertile brain the crimes had, he believed, originated, and under whose devilishly planned directions they had been carried out.

The police had reason to suppose that the headquarters of the conspirators were in America and in Ireland, in which latter country the majority of the crimes—at all events of the earlier crimes—had been committed.

He regretted to say, but it was his duty to say, that but for the disloyal attitude of a section of the Irish people—who, from dastardly and contemptible cowardice, or from sympathy with the assassins, had withheld the evidence, without which it was impossible to trace the various outrages to their cause—the conspirators would long since have been brought to book.

The Secretary then went on to denounce, in the strongest language, what he called the infamous conduct of the disloyal Irish. He declared, amid ringing cheers, that the man or woman who sought to shield such a monster as Captain Shannon, or to protect him and his confederates from justice, was nothing less than a murderer in the eyes of God and of man. He informed the House that although the Government had actually framed several important measures which would go far to remove the grievances of which Irishmen were complaining, he, for one, would, in view of what had taken

place, strenuously oppose the consideration at that moment of any measure which had even the appearance of a concession to Irish demands; and he concluded by declaring that it was repression, not concession, which must be meted out to traitors and murderers.

Within a month after the delivery of this speech, all England was horrified by the news of a crime more wantonly wicked than any outrage which had preceded it; a crime which resulted—as its perpetrators must have been aware it would result—in the wholesale murder of hundreds of inoffensive people against whom, excepting for the fact that they happened to be law-abiding citizens, the followers of Captain Shannon could have no grievance.

All that was known was that a respectably dressed young man, carrying what appeared to be about a dozen well-worn volumes from Mudie's, or some other circulating library, had entered at Aldgate station an empty first-class carriage on the Underground Railway. These books were held together by a strap—as is usual when sending or taking volumes for exchange to the libraries—and it had occurred to no one to ask to examine them, although the officials at all railway stations had, in view of the recent outrages, been instructed to challenge every passenger carrying a suspicious-looking parcel.

The theory which was afterwards put forward

was that, what appeared to be a parcel of volumes from a circulating library, was in reality a case, cunningly covered with the backs, bindings, and edges of books, and that this case contained an infernal machine of the most deadly description. The wretch in charge of it was supposed purposely to have entered an empty carriage, and, after setting fire to the fuse, to have left the train at the next station.

That this theory afforded the most likely explanation of what subsequently took place, was generally agreed, although one well-known authority on explosives declared that no infernal machine, capable of causing what had happened, could be concealed in so small a compass as that suggested. But as was pointed out, in reply, it was clear, from discoveries which had been made in America and on the Continent, that the manufacture of infernal machines, and investigations into the qualities of explosives, were being scientifically and systematically carried on. Though no connection had as yet been traced between these discoveries and the perpetrators of the recent outrages, the probabilities were that such connection existed, and it was asked whether it might not be possible that some one who was thus engaged in experimenting with explosives had found a new explosive, or a new combination of explosives, which was different from,

and more deadly than anything known to the authorities.

Into the probability or improbability of this and other theories which were put forward, it would be idle here to enter. All that is known is that the train had only just entered the tunnel, immediately to the west of Blackfriars station, when there occurred an awful explosion. The passengers, as well as the guard, driver and stoker, not only of the train in which the explosion took place, but also of a train which was proceeding in the opposite direction, and happened to be passing at the time, were killed to a man. With the exception of one of Smith's book-stall boys, whose escape seemed almost miraculous, every soul in the station—ticket collectors, porters, station-master, and the unfortunate people who were waiting on the platform, shared the same fate.

Nor was this all, for, at the moment when the outrage occurred, the train was passing under one of the busiest crossings in London—that where New Bridge Street, Blackfriars Bridge, Queen Victoria Street and the Thames Embankment converge; and so terrific was the explosion that the space between these converging thoroughfares was blown away, as a man's hand is blown away by the bursting of a gun.

The buildings in the immediate neighbourhood, including part of St. Paul's station on the

London, Chatham and Dover railway, the offices over Blackfriars station, and De Keyser's Hotel on the opposite side of the way, were wrecked, and the long arm of Blackfriars Bridge lay idle across the river, like a limb which had been rudely hacked from a body.

I have no intention of sickening the reader by giving a realistic description of the awful sights which were witnessed when, after the first paralysing moment of panic was over, the search for the injured, the dying and the dead was commenced. The number of lives lost, including those who perished in Blackfriars station, in the two trains, in the street, and in the surrounding buildings, was enormous. Several columns of the papers next morning were filled with lists of the missing and the dead. One name on the list had a terrible significance. It was the name of the man, to achieve whose murder, the lives of so many innocent men and women had been ruthlessly sacrificed ; the name of a man whose remains were never found, but whose funeral pyre was built of the broken bodies of hundreds of his fellow-creatures—the name of the Chief Secretary for Ireland.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN SHANNON'S MANIFESTO

ON the day of the outrage upon the Metropolitan Railway, a manifesto from Captain Shannon, of which the following is a copy, was received by the Prime Minister at his official residence in Downing Street. It was written as usual in roughly printed capitals, and, as it bore the Dublin postmark of the preceding day, must have been posted before the explosion had taken place.

“TO THE PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND :—

“Fellow-countrymen and countrywomen, — The Anarchistic, Nihilistic, Fenian, and similar movements of the past have all been failures. That fact there is no denying. I do not mean to say that there have been no results to the glorious war which has been waged upon a society which is content to stand by heedless and unconcerned while Ireland is groaning under the heel of English oppression, and while Russia's many millions of starving and suffering fellow-creatures are the slaves of a system by which the honour, liberty, and life of every man, woman, and child

are at the mercy of a tyrant's whim and the whims of his myrmidons ; a society which looks on smiling while capitalists, who yawn as they seek to devise some new vice on which to squander the wealth which has become a burden to them, grind down and sweat the poor, setting one starving man to compete against another for a wage which can scarce find him and his in dry bread. A society which, calling itself Christian, and having it in its power to mend matters, can, unconcerned, endure such iniquities, is blood-guilty, and so long as these things last, upon society shall its crimes be visited—with society must all just men and true wage deadly war.

“ *What has been done hitherto has not been without results.*

“ *But for the justice which was executed upon the arch-tyrant Alexander of Russia ; the blow which was struck at English tyranny by the destruction of Clerkenwell prison ; the righteous punishment which befell those servants of tyrants and enemies of freedom, Burke and Cavendish—but for these and other glorious deeds, the bitter cry of the oppressed all over the world had passed unheard and unheeded, Ireland had not wrung from reluctant England the few paltry concessions that have been made, and the dawning of the great day of freedom had been indefinitely postponed.*

“ *But notwithstanding all that has been done,*

the fact remains, and cannot be denied, that Nihilists, Anarchists, Fenians, and those who, under different names and different leaders, are fighting for freedom throughout the world have up to the present failed to accomplish the results at which they aim.

"And why?"

"Because they have been scattered and separate organisations. Because each has worked independently of the other, and with no resources outside itself. So long as this sort of thing continues, nothing can be hoped for, but the throwing away of precious lives and sorely needed money to no purpose.

"But let these scattered forces combine into one organised and all-powerful Federation, and mankind will be at its mercy

"This is what has been done.

"The World Federation for the Advancement of Freedom is now an accomplished fact. All the secret societies of the world have combined into one common and supreme organisation, with one common enemy and one common purpose.

"That purpose is to rid mankind of the monsters of Monarchy and Imperialism, and with them of the whole vampire-brood of Peers, Nobles, and Capitalists who, in order that they may live in idleness and sensuality, grind the face of the poor, and drain, drop by drop, the hearts'-blood of toiling millions.

"Its object is to declare that all things are the property of the people. To wrench from the greedy maw of landowners and capitalists their ill-gotten gains, and to make restoration to the rightful possessors. To sweep from the face of the earth the fat priests, ministers, and clergy who batten and fatten on the carrion of dead and decaying religions. To preach the gospel of the Happiness of Man in place of the worship of God, and to declare the day of the Great Republic, when the many millions who have hitherto been ruled shall become the rulers.

"That this glorious consummation can be attained all at once, the Federation is not so sanguine as to expect. Its members know that though they have a lever strong enough to move the world, they must be content to work slowly. Mankind is a chained giant. Their aim is to set him free ; but to do this they must be content to knock off his fetters one by one ; and at the last meeting of the World Federation for the Advancement of Freedom it was unanimously agreed to inaugurate the great struggle for personal liberty, firstly, by emancipating Ireland from the English yoke, and secondly, by the overthrowing of Imperialism in Russia.

"The Council of the Federation has two reasons for deciding to commence the plan of campaign by freeing Ireland.

"The first is that the members know well that

the greatest enemy with which they have to contend—the last country to be convinced of the righteousness of their cause—will be England, that prince-ridden, priest-ridden, peer-ridden nation of flunkeys and enemies of freedom, a country which shed the blood of her own children in America rather than grant them their rightful independence, and now seeks in a similar way to keep Ireland, India, Canada, and Australia under her cruel heel. At England, then, it is right and fitting that the first blow should be struck.

“The other reason is that Ireland, when she is once set free, and in the hands of the Federation, is to be made the basis of future operations. It is very necessary that the Federation should have some such headquarters, and in regard to size (too large a centre is not desirable), shape, situation, and compactness, Ireland possesses peculiar natural advantages for the purpose. An island, surrounded on all sides—as by sentries—by the sea, no hostile force can steal upon her under cover and unawares. She is practically the key to Europe, and, as a vantage-ground from which to commence operations upon England, her position cannot be bettered.

“Is there a single thinking man or woman who cannot see that monarchy and imperialism, peers, clergy, and class distinctions are doomed, and that their utter downfall is only a matter of time? Germany, Russia, Austria, Italy, France

and England, are undermined to the very cores by Socialism and Anarchy. The mines which are to destroy society, as society now exists, are laid, though they are out of sight, and at any moment the opportunity may come to fire the train. Such an opportunity once occurred in France ; but what happened then, though it served to show what hatred of its rulers was seething unsuspected in the lowest stratum of society, was a mere accident. But if an accidental outbreak like the French Revolution could set rivers of blood running in France, what may we not expect from the Great Revolution which, when it comes, as come it must, will be the result, not of chance, but of long years of systematic propagation of socialistic principles among the masses,—which will be the outcome of the most subtly-planned and gigantic cheme for the liberation of mankind which the world has ever known !

“ There are people who will say that what happened on the other side of the Channel can never happen on this. But those who know what is going on in London, Manchester, Birmingham, and all the largest towns, know that we are living on the edge of a volcano ; that England is riper for revolution to-day than France was in 1789, though the danger is as little suspected now, as it was then, and that what happened then, and worse, may happen at any time in England, unless her councillors have the foresight

and the wisdom to give to the people what the people will assuredly otherwise take.

"It must be remembered that in England we have had, for more than half a century, a Queen who does not forget that, during that time, a complete revolution has taken place in many previously existing beliefs and systems; a Queen who knows that England will never tolerate another George IV.; who recognises that what was patiently borne sixty, forty, and twenty years ago, will not be endured for a moment to-day, and has wisely avoided everything which can put royalty on its trial, or the temper of the people to the test. Hence, though Englishmen knew that a day of reckoning between royalty and the people is nigh, they have tacitly consented to put off that day so long as she lives, and to call upon some other and less fortunate sovereign to settle the account. But the account, too long overdue, will soon have to be settled. As well might one man hope to stand against an incoming sea, as well might the courtiers of old King Canute think, by their chiding, to stay the rude waves from wetting the feet of their royal master, as the rich few think that they can withstand the millions of the poor, when the poor shall arise in their might and their right to claim as their own the riches which their labours have accumulated. In whose hands are those riches now? For answer let them look to the words

which are written in the very heart of their seething, starving London, over the portico of the Royal Exchange: 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.' Yes, the lords'—this duke's, that earl's—but not God's—if a God there be—or the people's.

"But it is to restore the earth and the fulness thereof to the people that the World Federation for the Advancement of Freedom is fighting. Its cause is the cause of the poor, and it is sacred. Long years of toiling for the bare necessities of life have so broken the spirit of the poor that they have become almost like beasts of burden that wince before a whip in the hands of a child, and bow themselves to the yoke, at the bidding of a master whose puny life they could crush out at a blow. It is time that the poor should be made to see the terrible power which, if only by virtue of their swarming millions, lies at their command.

"It is for the people of Great Britain to make choice whether they will throw in their lot with the winning side, while yet there is time to make terms, or whether they will sacrifice their lives and the lives of their wives and children to support a system by the destruction of which they will be the first to profit.

"And, in making such choice, it must be remembered that they have no longer against them, for the purpose of freeing Ireland and of emanci-

pating Russia, a handful of patriots, struggling hopelessly against overwhelming odds, but the whole of the secret societies of the world. They have against them the most gigantic and far-reaching organisation which has been formed within the history of man; an organisation, the wealth and power of which are practically unlimited; which counts among its members statesmen in every Court in Europe—statesmen who, although they hold the highest offices of trust in their country's councils, are secretly working in connection with the Federation; an organisation which has spies and eyes in every place, and will spare neither man, woman nor child in the terrible vengeance which will be visited upon its enemies.

“The people of England, and especially of London, will know, before the morrow, how far-reaching is the arm of the Federation, and how pitiless its vengeance. Let them be warned by what will occur this day on the Underground Railway, and let them beware lest, by hindering either actively or passively the work of the Federation, they incur that vengeance.—By order,

“CAPTAIN SHANNON.”

CHAPTER III

THE "DAILY RECORD" TO THE RESCUE

THREE days after the explosion, the *Daily Record*, which had, from the first, given exceptional prominence to everything connected with the outrages, issued a special supplement in which, in a letter to the people of England, the editor said that in view of the infamous conspiracy which had been formed against the welfare of the British Empire, and against the lives of British citizens, the proprietors of the *Daily Record* had, some months ago, decided to concentrate all their resources, capital and energy upon the discovery of the promoters of the conspiracy. In the carrying out of this investigation, the services of the very ablest English and foreign detectives had been engaged, their instructions being that, so long as absolute secrecy was observed, and ultimate success attained, the question of expense was to remain entirely unconsidered. As a result he was now able to supply the names and, in three cases, personal descriptions and portraits of seven men who were beyond all question

the leaders of the movement, and one of whom—though which he regretted he was at present unable to say—the notorious Captain Shannon himself. The proprietors of the *Record* had not intended, he said, to make known their discoveries until the investigation had reached a more forward and satisfactory stage; but, in view of what had recently occurred, they had decided that it would not be right to withhold any information which might assist in bringing the perpetrators of the diabolical outrage to justice. In conclusion, he announced that the proprietors of the *Daily Record* were prepared to offer the following rewards:—

First, they would pay to any person, by means of whose information the capture had been effected, a reward of £3,000 per head for the arrest of any of the seven men whose names appeared on the list.

Second, to any person who would give such information as would lead to the arrest of Captain Shannon, and at the same time furnish proof of his identity, they would pay a reward of £20,000.

And in offering these rewards, they made no exception in regard to the persons who were eligible to claim them. So long as the person claiming the reward or rewards had supplied the information which led to the arrest or arrests of the individuals indicated, the

money should be faithfully paid without question or reservation.

Needless to say, the publication of this letter, with the names, and in three cases with portraits, of the men who were asserted to be the leaders of the conspiracy, and the offer of such colossal rewards, created a profound sensation, not only in England and Ireland, but in America and on the Continent.

One or two of the *Daily Record's* contemporaries did not hesitate to censure the action which had been taken as an advertising dodge, and a well-known Conservative organ declared that such a direct insult to the authorities was calculated seriously to injure the national prestige of England—that the Government had made every possible effort to protect society and to bring the perpetrators of the recent outrages to book, and that the result of the *Record's* rash and ill-advised procedure would be to stultify the action of the police and to defeat the ends of justice.

On the other hand, the public generally—especially in view of the fact that the *Record* had succeeded in discovering who were the leaders of the conspiracy (which the police had apparently failed to do)—was inclined to give the editor and the proprietors credit for the patriotism they claimed, and it was confidently believed that the offer of so large a reward

would tempt some one to turn informer and to give up his confederates to justice.

What the *Daily Record* did for England, the *Dublin News*—which had been consistently loyal throughout, and the most fearlessly outspoken of all the Irish Press in its denunciation of Captain Shannon—did for Ireland. It hailed the proprietors and editor of the *Record* as patriots, declaring that, in view of the inefficiency which the Government had displayed in their efforts to protect the public, it was high time that the public should bestir itself and take the matter into its own hand. It reprinted, by the permission of the *Record*, the descriptions and portraits of the "suspects," and distributed them broadcast over the country; and it announced that it would add to the amount which was offered by the *Daily Record*, for information which would lead to the arrest of Captain Shannon, the sum of £5,000.

CHAPTER IV

THE MURDER IN FLEET STREET

TEN A.M. is a comparatively quiet hour in Fleet Street. The sale of morning papers has practically dropped, and as the second edition of those afternoon journals, of which no one ever sees a first, has not yet been served out to the clamouring and hustling mob at the distributing centres, no vociferating newsboys, aproned with placards of *Sun*, *News*, *Echo* or *Star*, have as yet taken possession of the street corners and pavement kerbs.

On the morning of which I am writing, the newspaper world was sadly in want of a sensation. A royal personage had, it is true, put off the crown corruptible for one which would lie less heavily on his brow; but he had, as a pressman phrased it, "given away the entire situation" by allowing himself for a fortnight to be announced as "dying." This, Fleet Street resented as unartistic, and partaking of the nature of an anti-climax. Better things, it contended, might have been expected from so eminent an individual; and as such a way of

making an end was not to be encouraged, the Press had, as a warning to other royal personages, passed by the event as comparatively unimportant.

It was true, too, that, as the Heir Apparent was about to enter a carriage on the previous evening, one of the horses had become slightly restive, and that the placards of the "Special" editions had, in consequence, announced an "Alarming accident to the Prince of Wales," which, when H.R.H. had contemptuously remarked that there never had been as much as an approach to danger, was changed in the "Extra Specials" to "The Prince describes his Narrow Escape."

The incident had, however, been severely commented on as "sensation-mongering" by the morning papers (badly in want of a sensation themselves), and was now practically closed, so that the alliterative artist of the *Morning Advertiser's* placards had nothing better upon which to exercise his ingenuity than a "Conflict among County Councillors," and the *Daily Chronicle's* most exciting contents were a poem by Mr. Richard le Gallienne and a letter from Mr. Bernard Shaw. Nor was anything doing in the aristocratic world. Not a single duke, marquis, earl, viscount or baron was appearing as respondent or co-respondent in a divorce case, or as actor in any turf or society scandal,

and there was a widespread feeling that the aristocracy as a whole was not doing its duty to the country.

As a matter of fact, one among many results of the sudden cessation, three months since, of every sort of Anarchistic outrage, had been that the daily journals could not seem other than flat and tame to a public which had previously opened the morning papers with apprehension and anxiety. Though the vigorous action taken by the editor of the *Daily Record* in London, and of the *Dublin News* in Dublin, had not, as had been expected, led to the arrest of Captain Shannon or his colleagues, it had apparently so alarmed the conspirators as to cause them to abandon their plan of campaign. The general opinion was that Captain Shannon, finding so much was known, and that, though his own identity had not been fixed, the personality of the leaders of the conspiracy was no longer a secret, had deemed it advisable to fly the country, lest the offer of so large a reward as £25,000 should tempt the cupidity of some of his colleagues. And as it always had been believed that he was the prime source and author of the whole diabolical conspiracy, the cessation of the outrages was regarded as a natural consequence of his flight.

I was thinking of Captain Shannon, and of the suddenness with which he had dropped out

of public notice, while I walked up Fleet Street on this particular morning. As I passed the *Daily Chronicle* buildings, and glanced at the placards displayed in the window, I could not help contrasting in my mind the unimportant occurrences, which were there in small type set forth, with the appalling announcement which had leapt to meet the eye from the same window, three months since. Just as I approached the handsome office of the *Daily Record* I heard the sound of the sudden and hurried flinging open of a door, and the next moment a man, wild-eyed, white-faced and hatless, rushed out into the road shouting, "Murder! Murder! Police! Murder!" at the top of his voice.

In an instant the human streams that ebb and flow ceaselessly in the narrow channel of Fleet Street — like contending rivers running between lofty banks—had surged up in a huge wave around him. In the next a policeman, pushing back the crowd with his right hand and his left, had forced a way to the man's side, inquiring gruffly, "Now then, what's up? And where?"

"Murder! The editor's just been stabbed in his room by Captain Shannon or by one of his agents! Don't let any one out! The assassin may not have had time to get away!" was the breathless rejoinder.



Captain Shannon.

"Murder! murder!"

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There are no more efficient police officers than those of the City of London, and on this occasion they acted with admirable promptitude. Other constables had now hurried up, and at once proceeded to clear a space in front of the *Record* office, forming a cordon on each side of the road, and allowing no one to pass in or out.

A messenger was despatched in haste for the nearest doctor, and when guards had been set at every entrance to, and possible exit from, the *Record* office, two policemen passed within the building to pursue inquiries, and the doors were shut and locked.

Among the crowd outside the wildest rumours and speculations were rife.

"The editor of the *Record* had been murdered by Captain Shannon himself, who had come on purpose to wreak vengeance for the attitude the paper had taken up in regard to the conspiracy."

"The murderer had been caught red-handed, and was now in custody of the police."

"The murderer was concealed somewhere on the premises, and had in his possession an infernal machine with which it would be possible to wreck half Fleet Street."

(This last report had the effect of causing a temporary diversion in favour of the side streets.)

"The murderer had got clean away, and the whole staff of the *Record* had been arrested on suspicion."

These and similarly startling and equally well-founded rumours were passed from mouth to mouth and repeated with astonishing variations until the arrival of the doctor, who was by various well-informed persons promptly recognised as, and authoritatively pronounced to be, John Burns, the Captain of the Fire Brigade, Mr. W. T. Stead, and Sir Edward Bradford.

Every door, window and letter-box became an object of fearsome curiosity. People were half inclined to wonder how they could so many times have passed the *Record* office without recognising something of impending tragedy about the building—something of historic interest in the shape of the very window-panes and keyholes. One man among the crowd attained enviable notoriety by remarking, "Why, I see the editor go up that passage and through that door—the very door where he'd gone through that morning afore he was murdered—scores of times, and didn't think nothink of it;" which last admission, being emphatically made, seemed to impress the crowd with the fact that here at least was a fellow whose praiseworthy modesty deserved encouragement.

Meanwhile no sign that anything had transpired within the building was to be seen, and people were beginning to get impatient, when, from somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Thames Embankment, came that sound so familiar to Cockney ears—a sound which no true Londoner can hear with indifference—the hoarse vociferation of the newsvendors proclaiming some sensational news. At first it was nothing but a distant babel, like the husky barking of dogs, but, as it drew nearer, the shouts became more distinguishable, and I caught the words, “’Ere y’are, sir! *Sun*, sir! Murder of a heditor this mornin’! ’Ere y’are, sir!”

“That’s smart, that is!” said a fellow who was standing next to me in the crowd. “Tay Pay don’t let no grass grow under ’is feet, ’e don’t. Why, the murdered man ain’t ’ardly cold, and ’ere it is all in the *Sun*!”

“Shut yer jaw,” said a woman near him. “’Tain’t this murder at all—can’t yer ’ear?” And then, as the moving babel, like a slowly travelling storm-cloud, drew nearer and nearer, and finally burst upon Fleet Street, we could make out what the newsvendors were hoarsely vociferating.

“’Ere y’are, sir! *Sun*, sir! Murder o’ the heditor o’ the *Dublin News* this mornin’. Capture o’ the hassassin, who turns hinformer.

Captain Shannon's name and hidentity disclosed. The 'ole 'ideous plot laid bare. 'Ere y'are, sir!"

Elbowing my way through the crowd as best I could, I succeeded at last in getting within a yard or two of a newsboy, and by offering him a shilling, and telling him to keep the change, I possessed myself of a *Sun*. This is what I read at the top of the centre page:—

"The editor of the *Dublin News* was stabbed in the street at an early hour this morning. The murderer was captured, and he has now turned informer. The police refuse to give any information in regard to what has been divulged, but there is no doubt that Captain Shannon's name and identity have at last been disclosed."

CHAPTER V

THE IDENTITY OF CAPTAIN SHANNON DISCLOSED AT LAST

THE news that the captured conspirator had turned informer, and divulged the name and identity of Captain Shannon, created, as may be supposed, the wildest excitement. Contrary to general expectation, the authorities seemed willing to accord information, instead of withholding it, though whether this was not as much due to gratification at finding themselves in the novel position of having any information to accord, as to their desire to allay public anxiety, may be questioned.

The editor of the *Dublin News* had, it seemed, been speaking at a public dinner, and was returning between twelve and one o'clock from the gathering. As it was a close night, and the room had been hot, he told a friend that he should walk home, instead of driving. This he had apparently done, for a police constable, who was standing in the shadow of a doorway near the editor's residence, saw him turn the corner of the street, closely followed by another man,

who was presumably begging. The editor stopped and put his hand in his pocket, as if to search for a coin, and as he did so, the supposed beggar struck at him, apparently with a knife. The unfortunate gentleman fell without a cry, and the assassin then stooped over him and repeated the blow, after which he started to run at full speed in the direction of the constable, who drew back within the doorway until the runner was almost upon him, when he promptly tripped his man up, and held him down until assistance arrived. When taken to the station, the prisoner at first denied, with much bluster, all knowledge of the crime; but when he learned, with evident dismay, that the murder had been witnessed, and saw the damning evidence of guilt in the shape of blood spattering upon his right sleeve, his bluster gave place to grovelling terror, and though he refused to give any account of himself, he was removed to a cell in a state of complete collapse.

Next morning his condition was even more abject. The result of his self-communings had apparently convinced him that the hangman's hand was already upon his neck, and that his only chance lay in turning informer and throwing himself upon the mercy of the authorities. The wretched creature implored the police to believe that he was no assassin by his own



"He promptly tripped his man up.

Captain Shannon.

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choice, and that the murder would never have been committed had he not gone in fear of his life from the spies and agents of Captain Shannon, whose instructions he dared not disobey. He expressed his readiness to reveal all he knew of the conspiracy, and declared that he was not only aware who Captain Shannon was, but that he actually had a portrait of the arch-conspirator, which he was prepared to hand over to the police.

He then went on to say that the murder of the editor of the *Dublin News* was to be companioned in London by the murder of the editor of the *Daily Record*, on hearing which startling piece of news the Dublin police wired immediately to New Scotland Yard and to the London office of the *Daily Record*. The warning arrived at the latter place a few minutes too late, however; for, when the telegram was taken to the editor's room, that unfortunate gentleman was found lying stabbed to the heart.

An alarm was raised, as already described, and the doors locked; but all that could be discovered was that a well-groomed and young-looking man, dressed and speaking like a gentleman, had called, some ten minutes before, saying that he had an appointment with the editor. He had sent up the name of Mr. Hiram B. Todd, of Boston, and the editor's reply had been, "Show the gentleman in."

Why this unknown stranger was allowed access to an editor who is generally supposed to be entirely inaccessible to outsiders, there was not a particle of evidence to show. All that was known was that a minute or two before the discovery of the murder, the supposed Mr. Todd had left the editor's room, turning back to nod "Good-morning; and thank you very much" at the door, after closing which he had made his way to the entrance, and disappeared. No cry or noise of scuffling had been heard, but from the fact that the editor was lying face downwards over a table upon which papers were generally kept, it was supposed that he had risen from his chair, and walked across the room to this table, to look for a manuscript or memorandum. In doing so, he must have turned his back upon the visitor, who had apparently seized the opportunity to stab his victim to the heart; and had then left the building just in time to escape detection.

The importance of the arrest which had been made was fully realized when, two days after its occurrence, the name, personal description, and portrait of Captain Shannon were posted at every police-station in the kingdom, with the announcement that the Government would pay a reward of £5,000 for information which should lead to his arrest.

He was, it seemed, the fourth man on the

Daily Record's list, his name being James Mullen, an Irish-American, and he was described as between forty and fifty years of age, short in stature, and slightly lame. In complexion he was stated to be dark, with brown hair and bushy beard, but his most distinguishable feature was said to be his eyes, which were described as particularly full and fine, with heavy lids.

Then came the portrait, which, when I looked at it, startled me strangely. The face as I saw it there was unknown to me; but that somewhere and sometime in my life I had seen the face—not of some one resembling this man, but of the very man himself, I was positive, though under what circumstances I could not for the life of me remember. I have as a rule an excellent memory, and I attribute this very largely to the fact that I *never allow myself to forget*. Memory, like the lamp which came into the possession of Aladdin, can summon magicians to aid us at call. But memory is a lamp which must be kept bright by constant usage, or it ceases to retain its power. The slave-sprites serve mortals none too willingly, and if, when you rub the lamp, the attendant sprite come not readily to your call, and you, through indolence, allow him to slip back into the blue, be sure that when next you seek his offices he will again be mutinous. And if on that occasion you compel him not, he will be-

come more and ever more slack in his service, and finally will shake off his allegiance and cease to do your bidding at all.

Hence, as I have said, I never allow myself to forget, though, when I stumble upon a stubborn matter, I go like a dog with a thorn in his foot, till the thing be found. Such a matter was it to remember where and when I had seen the face that so reminded me of Captain Shannon. Day after day went by, and yet, cudgel my brains as I would, I could get no nearer to tracing the connection, and but for sheer obstinacy, had pitched the whole concern out of my mind, and gone about my business. Sometimes I was nigh persuaded that the thing I sought was sentient and alive, and was dodging me of pure devilry and set purpose. Once it tweaked me, as it were, by the ear, as if to whisper therein the words I was wanting; but when I turned to attend it, lo! it was gone at a bound, and was making mouths at me round a corner. It seemed as if—as sportsmen tell us of the fox—the creature rather enjoyed being hunted than otherwise, and entered into the sport with as much zest as the sportsman. Sometimes it cast in my way a colour, a sound, or an odour (I noticed that when I smelt tobacco I seemed, as the children say, to be getting “warmer”) which set me off again in wild pursuit, and with some promise of

success. And when I had for the fiftieth time abandoned the profitless chase, and, so to speak, returned home and shut myself up within my own walls, it doubled back to give a runaway knock at my door, only to mock me, when I rushed out, by the flutter of a garment in the act of vanishing.

I was, however, resolved that not all its freaks should avail it ultimately to escape me, for though I had to hunt it through every by-way and convolution of my brain, I was determined to give myself no rest till I had laid it by the heels; and lay it by the heels I eventually did, as you shall shortly hear.

Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes is of opinion that "Memory, imagination, old sentiments and associations, are more readily reached through the sense of smell than by almost any other channel." The probable reason for this strange connection between the sense of smell and the mind is, he tells us, "because the olfactory nerve is the only one directly connected with the hemispheres of the brain—the part in which we have every reason to believe the intellectual processes are carried on." "To speak more truly," he continues, "the olfactory nerve is not a nerve at all, but a part of the brain, in intimate connection with its anterior lobes. Contrast the sense of taste as a source of suggestive impressions with that of smell. Now

the nerve of taste has no immediate connection with the brain proper, but only with the prolongation of the spinal cord."

Curiously enough, it was in connection with a scent that I ultimately succeeded in recalling where and under what circumstances I had seen the face of which I was in search, and but for the fact of my having smelt a particular odour in a particular place, this narrative would never have been written.

I have said that when I smelt tobacco, I felt that I was, as the children say, "getting warmer." But it so happens that tobacco, in the shape of pipe, cigar, or cigarette, is in my mouth whenever I have an excuse for the indulgence, and often when I have none. Hence, though the face I sought seemed more than once to loom out at me through tobacco smoke, I had watched too many faces through that pleasing mist, to be able to recall the particular circumstances under which I had seen the one in question. Nevertheless it was tobacco which ultimately gave me my clue.

The morning was very windy, and I had three times unsuccessfully essayed to light my cigar with an ordinary match. In despair—for in a general way I hate fusees like poison—I bought a box of vesuvians which an observant and enterprising match-vendor promptly thrust under my nose. As I struck the vile thing

and the pestilent smell assailed my nostrils, the scene I was seeking to recall came back to me.

I was sitting in a third-class smoking carriage on the London, Tilbury, and Southend Railway, and opposite to me was a little talkative man who had previously lit his pipe with a fusee. I saw him take out the box, evidently with the intention of striking another, and then I heard a voice say, "For Heaven's sake, sir, don't stink the carriage out again with that filthy thing! Pray allow me to give you a match."

The speaker was sitting directly in front of me, and as I recalled his face while I stood there in the street, with the still unlighted cigar between my lips, the open box in one hand, and the now burnt-out fusee, arrested half-way toward the cigar tip, in the other, I knew that his face was the face of Captain Shannon.

CHAPTER VI

I DECIDE TO TURN DETECTIVE

THE striking of that fusee was a critical moment in my life, for before the thing had hissed itself into a black and crackling cinder, I had decided to follow up the clue which had been so strangely thrown in my way. My principal reason for so deciding was that I wanted a rest—the rest of a change of occupation, not the rest of inaction. I am by profession what George Borrow would have called, “one of those writing fellows.” But much as I love my craft, and generous and large-hearted as I have always found men of letters—at all events large-brained men of letters—to be, I cannot profess much admiration for the fussy folk who seem to imagine that God made our world and the infinite worlds around it, life and death, and the human heart with its joys and sorrows and hope of immortality, for no other reason than that they should have something to write about. Instead of recognising that it is only the unintelligible mystery of life and death which makes literature of any consequence, they seem to fancy



"The striking of that fusee was a critical moment in my life."
Captain Shannon.

that literature is the chief concern and end of man's being. As a matter of fact, literature is to life what a dog's tail is to his body—a very valuable appendage; but the dog must wag the tail, not the tail the dog, as some of these gentry would have us to believe. The dog could at a pinch make shift to do without the tail, but the tail could under no circumstances do without the dog.

You may screw a pencil into one end of a pair of compasses, and draw as many circles of different sizes as you please, but it is from the other end that you must take your centre; and what the pivot end is to the pencil, life must be to literature.

Hence it is my habit, every now and then, to put away from me all that is connected with books and the making of books, and to live only to possess my own soul and this wonderful world about me.

At the particular date of which I am writing, the restlessness that is so often associated with the artistic temperament was upon me. I craved change, excitement, and adventure, and all these the following up of the clue which I held to the identity of Captain Shannon promised in abundance.

As everything depended upon the assumption that James Mullen was, in reality, Captain Shannon, the first question which I felt it necessary

seriously to consider was whether the informer's evidence was to be credited; and I did not lose sight of the fact that his confessions, so far from being entitled to be regarded as *bond-fide* evidence, were to be received with very grave suspicion. At best, they might be nothing more than inventions, by means of which he hoped to stave off for a time the otherwise inevitable death sentence which was hanging over his head. At the worst it was possible that the pretended Queen's Evidence had been carefully prepared beforehand by Captain Shannon, and communicated by him to his agents, that it might be used in the event of any of them falling into the hands of the police. In that case the statements thus put forward, so far from being of assistance to the authorities, would be deliberately constructed with a view to mislead.

The one thing which I found it utterly impossible to reconcile with the theories I had formed about Captain Shannon, was that the informer should have in his possession a portrait of his chief.

Was it likely, I asked myself, that so cunning a criminal, as the man of whom I was in search, would, by allowing his portrait to get into the possession of his agents, place himself at the mercy of any scoundrel who, for the sake of a reward, would be ready to betray his leader?

On the contrary, was it not far more likely that the reason why Captain Shannon had so long eluded the police, and kept the authorities in ignorance of his very identity, was that he had carefully concealed that identity even from his own colleagues?

The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that so crafty a man—a man who was not only an artist but a genius in crime—would trust no one with a secret which concerned his own safety. On the few occasions upon which it would be necessary for him to come into personal contact with his confederates, it seemed more than probable that he would assume a definite and consistent disguise that would mislead even them, in regard to his appearance and individuality.

When asked how the portrait got into his possession, and whether it were a good likeness, the informer replied that he had only seen Captain Shannon once. He had met his chief after dark at Euston station, he said, and the portrait had been sent to him beforehand, so that he might have no difficulty in recognising the person to whom he was to deliver a certain package. He added that, so far as he could see, it was an excellent likeness.

Some such explanation as this was just what I had expected. If the portrait were intended, as I supposed, to mislead the police, I was sure

that Captain Shannon would invent beforehand some plausible story to account for its being in the possession of one of his colleagues. Otherwise the fact that a criminal, for whose arrest a large reward had been offered, had, for no apparent reason, given his photograph to a confederate, would arouse suspicion of the portrait's genuineness.

That the portrait represented not the real, but the disguised Captain Shannon, I was equally confident. I thought it more than possible that the man I had to find would be the exact opposite of the man who was there portrayed, and of the informer's description. For instance, as the pictured Captain Shannon was evidently dark, and was said to be dark by the informer, the real Captain Shannon would probably be fair, as the more dissimilar was the man himself from the man for whom the police were searching, the less likely would they be to find him.

Then again, it had been particularly stated by the informer that the fugitive was slightly lame, and to this the police attached the greatest importance. The fact that he had an infirmity so easily recognised, and so difficult to conceal, was considered to narrow the field of their investigations to the smallest compass, and to render his ultimate capture a certainty.

For myself, I was not at all sure that this supposed lameness was not part and parcel of

Captain Shannon's disguise. A sound man could easily simulate lameness, but a lame man could not so simulate soundness of limb; and I could not help thinking that were Captain Shannon lame, as had been asserted, he would have taken care to conceal the fact from his confederates.

If the police could be induced to believe that the man they wanted was lame, they would not be inconveniently suspicious about the movements of a stranger, evidently of sound and equal limb, who might otherwise be called upon to give an account of himself.

Being curious to know what course they were pursuing, I made it my business, within the next few days, to scrape acquaintance with one of the ticket-collectors at Euston. After propitiating him by a judicious application of "palm oil," I ventured to put the question whether he had noticed at any time a short, dark, lame man on the platform where the Irish mail started.

A broad grin came over the fellow's face in reply.

"What! are they on that lay still?" he said derisively. "I knew you was after something, but I shouldn't have took you for a detective."

I assured him that I was not a detective, and asked him to explain, whereupon he told me that, immediately after the publication of the portrait of Captain Shannon, instructions had

been sent, to all railway stations, that a keen look-out was to be kept for a short, dark, lame man, whether clean shaven or bearded, and that should a person in any way resembling James Mullen (whose portrait was placed in the hands of every ticket-collector) come under notice, the police should instantly be communicated with.

"Why, if you was to know, sir," said the collector, "how many short, dark, respectable gents what happens to be lame have been took up lately on suspicion, you'd larf, you would. It's bad enough to be lame at any time, but when you're going to be arrested for an anarchist as well, it makes your life a perfect misery, it do."

CHAPTER VII

MY FIRST MEETING WITH JAMES MULLEN

AND now it is time I told the reader something more about the circumstances under which I had seen James Mullen, and why I was so positive that he and the man in whose company I had travelled to Southend were one and the same person.

Firstly, it must be remembered that I had been seated for more than an hour opposite to my travelling companion, during which time I had watched him narrowly; and secondly, that there are some faces which one never forgets. It was such a face that I had seen on that eventful journey. The eyes were bright and prominent, the complexion clear and pale, and the nose well shaped, though a little too pronouncedly aquiline. The nostrils were very unusual, being thin and pinched, but arching upward so curiously that one might almost fancy a part of the dilatable cartilage on each side had been cut away. The chin, like the

me all that could be discovered concerning Mullen's past.

This being satisfactorily arranged, I started for Southend, whither I intended journeying in the company of the little talkative man, with whom Mullen had had the brush about the fusees. I thought it more than likely that he was a commercial traveller, partly because of the frequency with which he had interpolated the word "sir" into any remarks he made, and partly because of his insinuating politeness towards Mullen and myself — politeness which seemed to suggest that he had accustomed himself to look upon every one with whom he came into contact as a possible customer, under whose notice he might one day have occasion to bring the excellence of his wares. I knew that he lived at Southend from something he had said on the journey, and I decided that, in order to fall in with him again, I could not do better than keep an eye upon the Southend platform of the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway at Fenchurch Street. After watching the barrier for half an hour, I saw him enter an empty third-class smoking compartment, five minutes before the departure of an evening train. Slipping half-a-crown into the guard's hand, I asked him to put me into the same carriage, and to reserve it. The bribe effected the desired result, for when the train moved out

of the station, the little man and myself had the compartment to ourselves.

I knew, from my companion's previous remarks, that, though talkative and inquisitive, he was also shrewd and observant, as men of his occupation generally are, and as it would be necessary for me to ask him two or three pertinent questions, I thought it advisable to let the first advance come from him. He was already eyeing me to ascertain whether an overture towards sociability would be welcomed, and the result was apparently satisfactory, for after an introductory cough he inquired whether I would like the window up or down.

When you wish to be left to the company of your newspaper, or of your own thoughts, during a railway journey, you will do well to beware of the man who is unduly anxious for your comfort. 'Twere wise to roar him at once into silence, for your gentle answer, instead of turning away wrath, is too often apt to beget it. Speak him civilly, and you deliver yourself bound into his hands; for you have scarce made your bow of acknowledgment, and sunk back into your place, before his tongue is hammering banalities about the weather at the thick end of the wedge he has inserted. In the present instance, as the little man sat facing the engine, with the wind blowing directly in upon him, whereas I was on the opposite and

sheltered side, the window rights were, according to the unwritten laws of the road, entirely at his disposal. But as it suited my purpose to show a friendly front to his advances, I protested with many thanks that I had no choice in the matter, and awaited with composure the inevitable observation about the probability of rain before morning. From the weather and the crops we got to the results of a wet summer to seaside places generally, and thence to Southend, *apropos* of which I remarked that I thought of taking a house there, and asked him about the residents.

"Oh, Southend is very much like other towns of the sort, sir," he answered. "It's got a great many pleasant, and a few objectionable folks. There are the local celebrities (Eminent Nobodies I call them), who, it is true, are very important personages indeed—their importance in Southend being only equalled by their utter insignificance and total extinction outside that locality. And there's a good sprinkling of gentlemen with 'sporting' tendencies, though I must tell you, sir, that the qualities which constitute a man a sportsman in Southend are decided proclivities towards cards, billiards, and whisky—especially whisky. But take the Southend folk all round they're the pleasantest of people, and a chummier sort of place I never knew."

I made a great show of laughing at the little man's description, which, as he evidently laid himself out to be a wit, put him in good humour with himself and with me. I then went on to say that I thought he and I had travelled down together on another occasion, and reminded him of the fusee incident.

He replied that he did not recollect me, which was not to be wondered at, for I had been sitting in the darkest corner, and had taken no part in the conversation. "But I remember the man who objected so to the fusee," he went on, with a smile. "He *did* get excited over it, sir, didn't he?"

I agreed, and asked my fellow-passenger, as unconcernedly as I could, whether the person in question were a friend of his.

"No, sir, I can't say that he's a friend," was the answer; "but I've travelled down with him several times, and always found him very pleasant company."

I was glad to hear this, for it satisfied me that the fact of my having seen Mullen in the South-end train was not due to a chance visit which might not have been repeated. Had it been so, the difficulty of my undertaking would have been enormously increased, for I should then have held a clue only to his identity, whereas I had now a clue to his whereabouts.

"But since you mention it, sir," my com-

panion went on somewhat vaguely, "since you mention it—though it had never struck me before—it is rather strange that, though I've seen our friend several times in the train, I have never once seen him anywhere in Southend. In a place like that, you know, sir, you are bound to see any one staying there, and in fact I've often knocked up against the same people half a dozen times in an evening—first on the cliffs, then on the pier, and after that in the town. But I can't recall ever once seeing our fusee friend anywhere. It seems as if when he got to Southend he vanished into space."

I looked closely at the little man to see whether the remark had been made with intentional significance, and indicated that he too entertained suspicions of Mullen's object in visiting Southend. This was apparently not the case, however; for, after two or three irrelevant observations, he got upon the subject of politics, and continued to bore me with his own very positive ideas upon the matter for the rest of the journey.

If Mullen were hiding in the neighbourhood of Southend, the odds were that he was somewhere on board a boat. To take a house would necessitate giving references, and might lead to inquiries. On the other hand, the keepers of hotels and lodging-houses are often inconveniently inquisitive, and their servants are

apt to gossip and pry. If Mullen had a small yacht lying off the town, and lived on board, as is the custom of many yachting men, no one except the fellow whom he put in charge as "skipper" need know anything about his doings. A fugitive from justice should let as few persons as possible into any secrets concerning his movements. The odds—as represented by all society against a single man—are something like a thousand to one on the fugitive's apprehension; and in view of the vast network of police organization which is spread over the country, and of the co-operation which is accorded by the press, the public, and the police of other nationalities, as well as of the facilities for communication and for identification which the introduction of telegraphy and photography now afford, the only wonder is, not that so many criminals are captured, as that any should escape the meshes of the law at all. Hence—the odds being, as I say, so heavily against him, and in favour of the police at the start—the fugitive cannot afford to handicap himself in any way; and every additional person who is in a position to come forward with evidence concerning his movements adds perceptibly to the risk.

All this so shrewd a man as Mullen would be sure to recognise, and by selecting a boat as his hiding-place, he would narrow down the number of possible informants to a single soul.

Before commencing my search I thought it advisable to look up an old friend of mine, Hardy Muir, a painter, who lives at Leigh, near Southend. Muir is a broad-shouldered, burly-chested giant, with a heart almost as big as his body. Put him at the tiller of a tiny yacht, with a sea running that would make the captain of an ocean-going steamer look sick,—and his hand and nerve seem made of iron; but show him a pitiful look on the face of a child, and no woman's heart could be more tender, no woman's touch more gentle than his.

I was sure he would join cordially in an enterprise which had for its object the hunting down of such an enemy of the race as Captain Shannon. But to have taken him into my confidence would have been madness, for, had we succeeded in laying hands upon the arch-conspirator, nothing short of murder could have prevented Muir from then and there pounding the monster into a pulp. I had myself no objection to such a proceeding, but as I considered that the ends of justice would be better served by the handing over to the authorities of Captain Shannon's person in one piece, rather than in many, I decided to withhold from my impetuous friend the exact reason for my being in Southend. As a matter of fact it was not his assistance that I needed, but that of a very quiet-tongued, shrewd, and reliable man named

Quickly, who was employed by Muir as skipper of his yacht. It occurred to me that Quickly would be the very person to find out what I wished to know about the boats, concerning which I was unable to satisfy myself. Men of his class gossip among themselves very freely, and inquiries made by him would seem as natural as the curiosity of the servants' hall about the affairs of masters and mistresses, whereas the same inquiries made by me, a stranger, would be certain to arouse suspicion, and might even reach the ears of Mullen himself, were he in the neighbourhood.

"All serene, my boy," said Muir, when I told him that I required Quickly's help for a few days on a matter about which I was not then at liberty to speak. "You're just in time. Quickly was going out with me in the boat, but I'll call him in."

"Quickly," he said when the skipper presented himself, "this is Mr. Max Rissler, whom you know. Well, Mr. Rissler's a very particular friend of mine, and by obliging him, you'll be obliging me. He's to be your master for the next day or two, and I want you to do just as he tells you, and to keep your mouth shut about it. Mr. Rissler's going to have some lunch with me now. In the meantime, you go into the kitchen and play Rule Britannia upon the cold beef and beer, and be ready to go into Southend

with him by the next train, as he's in a hurry, and wants to set to work this afternoon."

And set to work that afternoon we did, our plan being to make out a list of all the vessels lying off the neighbourhood, and to ascertain who were the owners of the different crafts, and the names of all on board. The task was not difficult, for Quickly seemed to know the name and history of almost every vessel afloat. The result was, however, disappointing. Nowhere could we discover any one answering to Mullen's description, or indeed any one for whose presence on board the boat in question we could not satisfactorily account.

Even the Nore lightship, which lies several miles out to sea, was not forgotten, for the first idea which occurred to me, in connection with Mullen and Southend, was, what a snug and out-of-the-world hiding-place the lightship would make, were it possible to obtain shelter there.

Had there been only one man in charge, it was not inconceivable that he might—like the warder who assisted the Head Centre, James Stephen, to escape from Dublin jail in 1865—have been a secret sympathiser with the conspirators, or at all events in their pay, and that a fugitive who could offer a sufficiently tempting bribe might succeed in obtaining shelter and the promise of silence.

I found on inquiry, however, that there was a crew on board, and that the lightship is frequently visited by the Trinity House boats, so the chance of any one being concealed there was out of the question.

But though I dismissed the lightship from my consideration, I could not help asking myself whether there might not be, in the neighbourhood of Southend, some similar spot to which the objection, which rendered the Nore lightship impossible as a hiding-place, would not apply.

As I did so the thought of the dynamite hulks off Canvey Island occurred to me.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DYNAMITE HULKS

NO one who has not visited Canvey would believe that so lonely and out-of-the-world a spot could be discovered at a distance of thirty miles from London. Just as we sometimes find—within half a dozen paces of a great city thoroughfare, where the black and pursuing streams of passengers who throng its pavements never cease to flow, and where the roar of traffic is never still—some silent and unsuspected alley or court into which no stranger turns aside, so, bordering the great world-thoroughfare of the Thames, is to be found a spot where life seems stagnant, and where scarcely one of the thousands who pass within a stone's-throw has ever set foot.

Where the Thames swings round within sight of the sea, there lies, well out of the sweep of the current, a pear-shaped island, some six miles long and three miles broad, which is known as Canvey.

Three hundred years ago it was practically

uninhabitable. At high tide the marshes were flooded, and it was not until 1623 that James I. invited a Dutchman named Joas Croppenburgh to settle there, offering him a third for himself if he could reclaim the island from the sea. This offer the enterprising Dutchman accepted, **and** immediately set to work to build a sea-wall, which so effectually protects the low-lying marsh-land, that, standing inside the wall, one seems to be at a lower level than the water, and can see only the topmost spars and sails of the, apparently, bodiless barges and boats that glide ghost-like by.

The evil-looking dynamite hulks which lie scowling on the water, like huge red coffins, are the most noticeable feature in the scenery of Canvey. Upward of a dozen of these nests of devilry are moored off the island, and are the first objects to catch the eye as one looks out from the sea-wall.

In view of the fact that the position of Canvey, in regard to one of the greatest water highways in the world, is like that of a house which lies only a few yards back from a main road,—one wonders at first that such a locality should have been selected, as the storage place of so vast a quantity of a deadly explosive. That it was so selected, only after the matter had received the most careful and serious consideration of the authorities, is certain; and

though very nearly the whole of the shipping which enters the Thames must necessarily pass almost within hail of the island, the spot is so remote and out of the way that it is doubtful if any safer or securer place could have been found.

The dynamite magazines consist, as their name indicates, of the dismantled hulks of old merchant vessels, which, though long past active service, are still water-tight. One man is in charge of each hulk, which he is instructed not to leave. If he wants anything from shore, it must be obtained for him by the boatman, whose sole duty it is to fetch and carry for the hulk-keepers.

Not only is a hulk-keeper, who happens to be married, forbidden to have his children with him, but even the presence of his wife is disallowed,—his instructions being that no one but himself is under any circumstances to come on board.

These rules are not, however, very rigidly kept. A hulk-keeper is only human, and as his life is lonely, it often happens that, when visitors row out to the vessel, he is by no means displeased to see them, and half-a-crown will frequently procure admittance, not only to his own quarters, but even to the hold where the explosive is stored in small oblong wooden boxes, each containing fifty pounds. Nor are

instances unknown where the solitude of a married hulk-keeper's life has been cheered by the presence of his wife—the good lady joining her husband immediately after an inspection, and remaining with him until another visit may be looked for. Even if the fact that she is on board becomes known on the island, the matter is considered as nobody's business but the inspector's, and the love of the watermen and villagers for that personage, in his official capacity, is not so strong as to lead them to go out of their way to assist him in the execution of his duty.

Had I not had reason to suppose that Mullen was somewhere in the neighbourhood of South-end, the possibility of his being on one of these hulks would never have occurred to me. But the more I thought of it, the more was I impressed with the facilities for lying in hiding which the vessels afforded, and I promptly decided to satisfy myself that the man I was looking for was on none of them.

A point, of which I did not lose sight, was that it was quite possible for a hulk-keeper, who was taciturn by nature, and not prone to gossip, to remain in entire ignorance of passing events, and of the rewards which had been offered for the apprehension of Captain Shannon. In fact, there is now in charge of a certain dynamite hulk, a man who is

never known to go ashore, to receive visitors, or to enter into conversation. Whether he is unable to read, I cannot say; but at all events he never asks for a newspaper, so that it is conceivable he may not know—happy man!—whether Conservatives or Liberals are in power, or even whether England is ruled by Queen Victoria or by Edward the Seventh.

I decided that the first thing to do was to make out a list of the dynamite hulks—just as I had made a list of the boats off Southend—and then to take the vessels, one by one, and satisfy myself that no one was there in hiding. I need not more fully describe the various inquiries than to say that, in order to avoid attracting attention, they were made, as at Southend, by the waterman Quickly.

Most of the hulks are moored in the creek within sight of Hole Haven, where the principal inn of the island is situated, and all these we were soon in a position to dismiss from our calculations. But there was one hulk—the *Cuban Queen*, lying, not in the shelter of the creek, but in a much more lonely spot, directly off Canvey—in regard to which I was unable to come to a conclusion. It lay in deeper water, nearly a mile out, and no one seemed to know much about the man in charge, except that he was named Hughes, and was married. It was generally believed that his wife was often on

board, but, on the rare occasion when he came ashore, he transacted his business quickly, and returned to the ship without entering into conversation.

That he *had* some one—wife or otherwise—with him I soon satisfied myself, and that by very simple means.

The man whose duty it was to wait upon the hulk-keepers was, I found, a methodical sort of fellow who kept a memorandum book in which he made a note of the different articles he had to procure. Quickly managed to get hold of this book for me, and on looking over it I saw that, for some months back, the supply of provisions ordered by Hughes had doubled in quantity. This might of course be due to the fact that his wife was on board; and, indeed, Quickly reported that the hulk attendant had remarked to him, "Hughes have got his old woman on the *Cuban Queen*. I see her a-rowing about one night in the dinghy."

But I made another and much more significant discovery when looking over the book—a discovery which the presence of Mrs. Hughes did not altogether explain—and that was, *that not only had the quantity of food supplied to Hughes been largely increased, but that the quality was vastly superior.*

The man in attendance on the hulk had probably failed to notice this fact, and I did not

deem it advisable to arouse his suspicions by making further inquiries. But I at once decided that, before I put against the name of the *Cuban Queen* the little tick which signified that I might henceforth dismiss it from consideration, I should have to make the personal acquaintance of "Mrs. Hughes."

CHAPTER IX

I TAKE UP MY QUARTERS AT CANVEY

UP to this point I had, as far as possible, avoided visiting Canvey myself, but I now came to the conclusion that the time had arrived when it would be necessary to carry on my investigations in person. As my friend Muir, who is an ardent sportsman, rents part of the island to shoot over, I induced him to ask the landlord of the inn at Hole Haven to find a bed for me, under the pretence that I was a friend who had come to Canvey to sketch.

A week passed uneventfully, and then Muir, accompanied by Quickly, came over from Leigh for a few hours' shooting. After a late lunch we made our way on foot, and inside the seawall, toward the eastern end of the island. My interest in the sport was not very keen, for I was keeping half an eye meanwhile upon the hulk. It was becoming dark by the time we started to retrace our steps, and just as we reached the point off which the *Cuban Queen* was lying, I fancied I heard the stealthy dip

of oars. Peering over the sea-wall, I saw that some one was coming on shore from the *Cuban Queen* under cover of twilight, and that instead of making for the usual "hard" at Hole Haven, the oarsman, whoever he might be, clearly intended effecting a landing at some more secluded spot. As soon as I had satisfied myself of this, I stole softly back, and telling Muir and Quickly what I had seen, I asked them to crouch down with me behind some bushes to wait events.

In another minute we heard the grinding of the keel upon the shingle, followed by a few whispered words. A low voice said, "Pass me out the parcel and I'll push her off." Again we heard the stones scrunch, "good-nights" were exchanged, and receding oar-dips told us that the boat was returning to the hulk. Then somebody climbed the sea-wall, and stood still for half a minute as if looking around to make sure that no one was in sight. Our hiding-place was, fortunately, well in shadow, and we were in no danger of being discovered, but it was not until the person who had landed had turned, and taken some steps in the opposite direction, that I ventured to lift my head. Night was fast closing in, but, standing as the new-comer was upon the sea-wall, silhouetted against the darkening sky, I could distinctly see that the figure was that of a woman.



"I could distinctly see that the figure was that of a woman."
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"Hughes's old woman, sir," Quickly whispered in my ear; but I motioned that he was to be silent. Almost the next moment Muir spoke, with evident disgust, and by no means in a whisper. "Look here, Master Max Rissler," he said. "Eavesdropping and foxing about after women isn't in my line. You haven't told me what your little game is, and I haven't asked you. I've a great respect for you, as you know, but if you're playing tricks with that poor devil's wife, why, damme, man, I'd as soon knock your jib amidships as look at you."

I could have strangled the big-hearted, blundering Briton, but had to content myself by shaking a fist at him and grinding my teeth with vexation until I grinned, for "Mrs. Hughes" was still within earshot. It did not lessen my annoyance to know, from the approving grimace which I could feel, rather than see, on the generally expressionless face of Quickly, that he also credited me with evil designs upon "Mrs. Hughes," and shared his master's sentiments.

Him, too, I was strongly moved to strangle; and that I resisted the temptation was due chiefly to the fact that I had present need of his services.

"Look here, old chap!" I said to Muir when I thought it safe to speak. "Did you ever know me do a dirty action?"

"Never, my boy," he responded promptly.

"Well, I *can't* tell you my purpose in this business just now, except to say that if you knew it, you'd be with me heart and soul, and that if my surmise be right, the person we have just seen, dressed like a woman, isn't a woman at all, but a man. He isn't going to Hole Haven, for he's turned down the path that leads to the ferry at Benfleet. It looks as if he meant catching the nine thirteen train there for London from Southend. He must be followed, but not by me, and for two reasons. The first is that, while he's away, I must get, by hook or by crook, upon the *Cuban Queen*. The second is that I don't want him to see me, as in that case he'd know me again. Will you trust me that all's square until I can tell you the whole story, and in the meantime will you let Quickly follow that man and try to find out where he goes? It is most important that I should know."

"All serene, my boy," said Muir, slapping his great hand into mine too vigorously to be altogether pleasant, and too loudly to be discreet under the circumstances. "All serene; I'll trust you up to the hilt; and I'm sorry I spoke. Do what you like about the skipper, and I'll never ask a question."

I turned to Quickly: "Can you get round to the station before that person gets there,

and in such a way that he shan't know he's followed?"

"Yes, sir," said Quickly. "If I go through the churchyard and cross yon field."

"Off you go, then," I said. "Here are three pounds for expenses. Get to the station before he does, and keep an eye on him where he can't see you from the window of the men's waiting-room. If he goes into any waiting-room, it will have to be into the ladies', while he has that dress on. So you go into the general room. But take tickets before he gets there—one to Shoeburyness, which is as far as the line goes one way, and the other to London, which is as far as it goes in the opposite direction. If he waits for the next down train, you wait too, and go where he goes, but if he takes the up train to London, slip into the same train when his back is turned. Wherever he goes, up or down, you're to go too, and when he gets out, shadow him, without being seen yourself, and make a note of any place he calls at. Then when you've run him to earth, telegraph to Mr. Muir at the inn here—not to me—saying where you are, and I'll join you next train. But keep your eyes open at all the stations the train stops at, to see he doesn't get out and give you the slip. Do this job well, and carry it through, and there'll be a ten pound note for you when you get back. And now be off."

CHAPTER X

I BOARD THE "CUBAN QUEEN"

THE opportunity to pay a surprise visit to the *Cuban Queen* in the absence of "Mrs. Hughes" had come at last. I had hit upon a plan by which I might do so, without giving Hughes cause to suspect that my happening upon him was other than accidental, and I proceeded to put it into effect.

Telling Muir that I would rejoin him at the inn, I slipped off my clothes, tossed them together in a heap on the beach, with a big stone atop to keep them from being blown away, and plunged into the water. I am a strong swimmer, and the tide was running out so swiftly that when I reached the *Cuban Queen*, which was moored about a mile from shore, I was not in the least "winded," and indeed felt more than fit to fight my way back against the current. But according to the plan I had formed, it was necessary that to Hughes I should appear to be exhausted; so, as I neared the hulk, I began to make a pretence of swimming feebly, panting

noisily meanwhile, and sending up the most pitiful cries for help.

As I had expected and intended, Hughes heard me, and came on deck. Looking over the ship's side he inquired loudly, "Wot's the — row?"

I may here remark that Hughes, as I soon discovered (one could not be in his company for half a minute without doing so), was a man of painfully limited vocabulary. Perhaps I should say that his colour sense had been developed at the expense of his vocabulary, for if he did not see everything in a rose-coloured light, he certainly applied one adjective, vividly suggestive of crimson, to every object which he found it necessary to particularise.

"Wot's the — row?" he repeated, when there was no immediate reply to his question.

"Help!" I gasped faintly, pretending to make frantic clutches at the mooring chain of the hulk, and clinging to it as if half dead with exhaustion and fear.

"Who are yer?" he inquired suspiciously, "and 'ow'd yer get 'ere?"

I did not reply for at least a minute, but continued to pant, gasp, and cough, until my breath might reasonably be supposed to have returned, and then I said faintly, "Help me to get on board, and I'll tell you."

"Yer can't coom aboard," he answered surlishly.
"No one ain't allowed aboard these ships."

"I *must*," I said, with as much appearance of resolution as was consistent with the half-drowned condition which I had assumed.

"Must yer?" he said. "We'll jolly soon see about that," and, for the second time, he put the question, "Who are yer, and 'ow'd yer get out 'ere?"

I replied, in sentences suitably abbreviated to telegraphic terseness, that my name was Max Rissler. Was a friend of Mr. Hardy Muir. Was staying at Canvey for shooting. Had thought would like a swim. Had got on all right till I had tried to turn, and then had found current too strong. Had become exhausted, and must have been drowned if had not, fortunately, been carried past hulk.

Hughes evidently considered the explanation satisfactory, for his next question was not about myself but about my intentions.

"And wot are yer going to do now?"

"Come on board," I answered promptly.

"Yer can't do that," he said. "No one ain't allowed aboard these 'ulks."

"I must," I replied. "This is a case where you'd get into trouble for keeping the rules, not for breaking them. You can't talk about rules to a half-drowned man. It would be manslaughter. Help me on board and get me some



"'Ave yer got any iron concealed about yer person?"

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brandy—I suppose you've some by you—and I'll pay you well and not say a word to any one. And be quick about it, for I can't hold on here much longer. You'll be half-a-sovereign the richer for this night's job, and, if you're quick, I'll make it a sovereign."

Grumbling audibly about it being "a — fine lay this—making a poor man run the risk of getting the sack because — fools choose to play the — monkey," he unlashd the dinghy, and having brought her round to where I was clinging, he assisted me in, and with a few dexterous strokes took us to the side of the hulk, over which a rope-ladder was hanging. "Afore yer go aboard," he growled, putting a detaining hand upon my arm, "'ave yer got any iron concealed about yer person?"

"Iron?" I said. "What do you mean? And where could I conceal anything? Every stitch of my clothes is lying over there on the beach."

"My instructions is," he replied doggedly, "that I arsk every one wot cooms aboard this 'ulk whether they've got any iron concealed about 'em. That's my dooty, an' I does it. 'Ave yer, or 'ave yer not, got any iron on yer person?"

"Certainly not," I said, "unless the iron in my blood's going to be an objection. And now stop this fooling, and get me some spirit as fast as you can, for I'm dead beat."

As a matter of fact I was beginning to feel chilled to the bone, besides which it was very necessary that I should keep up the *rôle* I had assumed.

Hughes disappeared below, but soon returned with half a tumbler of rum and water, and an evil-smelling blanket. The rum I tossed off gratefully, but the blanket I declined.

"Very well," said Hughes. "But yer look as white as a — sheet already, and yer'll find it none too warm going back in the dinghy with nothink on."

"I'm not going back in the dinghy with nothing on, my good fellow," I replied calmly. "You've got a fire or a stove of some sort below, I suppose, and I'm going to sit by it, while you row back and get my clothes for me. Then you can put me ashore, and I shall have much pleasure in handing you the sovereign I've promised you, on condition that you give me your word, not to speak of this fool's game of mine. I don't want to be made the laughing-stock of the island. I told them I was a good swimmer, and if they heard that I sang out for help, and had to be taken back to shore like a drowned kitten, I should never hear the last of it, especially from that big brute of a Muir, who's always bragging about his own swimming."

Something like a grin stole over the fellow's forbidding face.

"Muster Muir 'e don't like no soft-plucked uns, 'e don't; and yer did sing out — loud, and no mistake. Yer told un yer could swim, did yer? Why, Muster Muir, I seen him swim out two mile and more, and then——"

"Confound Mr. Muir!" I interrupted angrily. "Do you think I'm going to stay here all night while you stand there jawing and grinning? Be off with you; and get my clothes for me, or you won't see a halfpenny of the pound I promised you."

"It wos two poun' as yer promised me," said the fellow, lying insolently now that he thought he had me in his power. "An' precious little, too, for a man wot's running the risk of getting the billet by lettin' strangers on board, dead against the rools. But I don't leave this yere ship for no two quid, I don't. Yer'll 'ave to coom along wi' me in the dinghy; an' mind I 'as the money afore yer 'as the clothes. None of yer monkey tricks with me, I tell yer. Wot's it to be? Are yer going back wi' me, or will yer wait for Mr. Muir to fetch yer? I can let 'im know in the morning (this with an impudent grin) as yer've been rescood."

"I don't go ashore without my clothes if I stop here all night," I snapped; "it's inhuman to ask me. What harm could I do to the confounded ship for the few minutes you're away? I don't want to stay here any longer

than I can help, I assure you. It was a sovereign I promised you; but if you'll row ashore as fast as you can, get my clothes, and promise to keep your mouth shut, you shall have two pounds. Will that please you?"

"Make it three," he said, "and I'll say done."

"Very well," I answered, "only be as quick as you can, for the sooner I'm out of this thieves' den, and have seen the last of your hangman face, the better. And now I'll go down out of the cold; and perhaps you won't grudge me another dram of that rum of yours, considering how you've bled me to-night."

Motioning that I was to follow, he led the way to the stern of the ship, where, as I knew, the hulk-keeper's quarters are situated—the dynamite being stored, as I have already said, in the hold.

A cockpit, from which there shot up into the night an inverted pyramid of yellow light, marked the entrance to the cabin. Hughes, disdainful of stairs, shuffled, feet foremost, into the opening, swinging a moment with palms resting on either ledge and his body pillared by rigid arms, before he dropped out of sight, like a stage Mephistopheles returning to his native hell. Not being familiar with the place, I was content to make a less dramatic entrance, and picked my way cautiously down the steep stairs and into the little cabin which served as kitchen,



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"He dropped out of sight."

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sitting-room, and dormitory. A lighted oil-stove stood in the centre, with a wooden chair beside it.

"You've got very comfortable quarters here," I said, looking round approvingly after I had seated myself. "If one doesn't mind a lonely life (it *is* lonely, I suppose?), one might do worse than turn hulk-keeper."

Hughes grunted by way of reply, but whether this was to be taken as signifying acquiescence or dissent I am unable to say, his expressive features being, at the moment, hidden in the dark recesses of a locker, whence he presently emerged with a bottle of Old Jamaica and a glass.

"There's the — rum, and there's the — glass; and now don't yer stir out of that — chair till I coom back," he said, with a liberal use of his favourite adjective. Then, much to my relief, he betook himself up the stairs, and on to the deck, where I could hear him muttering and swearing to himself, as he unlashed the dinghy.

That I was excited and eager, the reader may believe; but though, the instant Hughes's back was turned, my eyes were swivelling in their sockets, and sweeping the sides of the cabin with the intentness of a searchlight, I did not think it advisable to leave my seat, and set about the search in earnest, until he had actually

left the hulk. But no sooner was he well out of the way, than I was at work, with every sense as poised and ready to pounce as a hovering hawk.

Not often in my life have I experienced so bitter a disappointment. I had hoped great things of this visit to the *Cuban Queen*, but though I searched every part of the hulk, including the hold—which, as there happened at that moment to be no dynamite on board, was not secured—I found nothing to indicate the sex of Hughes's visitor. To describe the fruitless search in detail is unnecessary. Whoever "Mrs. Hughes" might be, she had evidently taken steps to remove all trace of her presence. I could not even tell whether she had shared the sleeping bunk with Hughes, for the blankets had been stripped off, leaving the bare boards without so much as a pillow, and the entire cabin had apparently been scrubbed from end to end, immediately before or after her departure.

The visit from which I had hoped so much turned out to be a lamentable failure. I was not one penny the wiser, but three pounds the poorer, for my trouble, not to speak of having caught a cold, of which I should think myself cheaply rid, if it led to nothing worse than a day in bed.

"The scheming rascal!" I said to myself.

"I might have known he wouldn't have let me down here, if he hadn't been sure that every sign of his having had a companion on board was cleared away. I suppose the secret of it all is, that he got word the inspector was coming to pay a visit to the hulks shortly, and he's packed off Mrs. Hughes, until it's all over. Very likely she set things straight herself before she went. All his pretended reluctance to go for my clothes, and to leave me here was assumed, so that he might bleed me to the tune of another pound. I should only be serving him out in his own coin if I gave information that he's had a woman on board the hulk against the rules.

"If it *was* a woman, it is very odd that she hasn't left behind her some little sign of her sex — a hairpin, a button, or a bonnet-pin. There are only short hairs—Hughes's evidently —on the brush, but she may have had her own brush and have taken it with her. But anyhow I might have expected to find — if not some hair-combings—at least a stray hair or two, which would have let me into the secret. Let's have another look! The neighbourhood of the mirror's the most likely place to come across them."

But search as I would, not a single hair could I find, and in another half-minute the near dip of oars announced the return of

Hughes. As I heard the jerk of the sculls from the rowlocks, and the grinding of the dinghy against the ship's side, I took another despairing look around the cabin, in the hope of lighting upon something that had hitherto escaped my notice. One object after another was hastily lifted, investigated, and as hastily put down, but always with the same result. Then, just as Hughes's step sounded upon the deck above, I caught sight of a little square of soap which lay upon the floor. It had been hidden by the corner of an oilskin coat that hung against the wall, for which reason it had probably escaped Hughes's notice, and would have escaped mine, but for the fact that I had taken the oilskin down to search the pockets. When I lifted my "find," I saw at once that it was damp from recent usage, and, as I turned it over, two or three hairs came off and adhered to my hand. As I looked at them I gave a low, long, but almost silent whistle. They were, beyond question, the bristles of a shaving brush which was fast going to pieces from length of service. That I was not mistaken in so thinking, was proved by the fact that the under side of the soap still bore the marks which had been made by the sweep of a brush over its surface, and that the lather upon it was damp.

Some one had been shaving, and that quite

recently, on the *Cuban Queen*. It could not be Hughes, for he wore a thick full beard. If the person who passed as "Mrs. Hughes" were a woman, it was not likely that she would have recourse to a razor to enhance her charms. If, on the other hand, that person were a man, who was personating a woman, for purposes of disguise—a razor would be an absolute necessity among his toilet requisites.

CHAPTER XI

I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT "THE GAME IS UP"

WE often read of a novelist "taking the reader into his confidence," but at this point of my narrative I should like to reverse the process, and ask my readers to take me into theirs.

Were I telling my story by word of mouth, instead of by pen, I should lay a respectful hand, my dear madam, upon your arm, or hook a detaining forefinger, my dear sir, into your button-hole, and leading you aside for a few minutes, should put the matter to you somewhat in this way :—

"From the fact of your following my record thus far, you are presumably interested in detective stories, and have no doubt read many narratives of the sort. You know the detectives who have been drawn, or rather created, by Edgar Allan Poe, and in more recent times by Dr. Conan Doyle and Mr. Arthur Morrison—detectives who unravel for us, link by link, in the most astounding and convincing manner,

and by some original method of reasoning, an otherwise inexplicable mystery or crime.

"And you know, too, the familiar bungler who is always boasting of his astuteness, unless, as occasionally happens (but only in the pages of a detective novel, for in real life our friends are more ready to record our failures than our successes), he has some applauding Boswell—a human note of exclamation—who passes his life in ecstasies of admiring wonder at his friend's marvellous penetration.

"And as it is not unlikely that you have your own opinion in regard to what a detective should, or should not do, under certain circumstances, I will ask you, at this point of my narrative, to take me into your confidence, and to let me put to you the following question. Suppose it had been you, and not I, who, in the hope of accomplishing the arrest of James Mullen—as we will henceforth call the person passing as Mrs. Hughes—had kept a watch upon the *Cuban Queen*, as described in Chapter IX. And suppose it had been you, and not I, who had been in the company of Muir and Quickly that evening, and had seen Mullen come from the hulk in a boat, under cover of twilight, and proceed in the direction of Benfleet, whence he could take train either to London or to Southend. Would you in that case have acted as I did, and instructed Quickly

to shadow him, so that you might get an opportunity of paying a surprise visit to the *Cuban Queen* in Mullen's absence? or would you have abandoned your proposed visit to the hulk, and decided to follow him yourself?"

Let me sum up briefly the arguments for and against either course, as they presented themselves to me when I had so hastily to make choice. In the first place, I had to recognise that in entrusting the task to Quickly, I had one or two very ugly possibilities to face. Though a sensible enough fellow for ordinary purposes, he was hardly the sort of man one would select for so delicate a piece of work as that of shadowing a suspect. He might prove himself sufficiently clever to carry it through successfully, but it was equally likely that he would fail, and it was even conceivable that he might so bungle it, as to attract the attention of Mullen, and thus frighten away the very bird for whom I was spreading a net. But what weighed with me even more than this was, that, in deputing Quickly to follow Mullen, I was losing sight, at all events for a time, of the central figure of my investigations, as they then stood—of the person whom, rightly or wrongly, I suspected to be the object of my search. And this was a course which no one, placed as I was, could adopt without the gravest misgiving.

On the other hand, the reasons which most influenced me, in deciding to entrust the task of shadower to Quickly, were equally weighty. If the person who was secreted on the *Cuban Queen* were James Mullen, he was not likely, in view of the hue and cry that had been raised, and of the vigorous search which was being made, to venture far from so secure a hiding-place as the hulk, and the probabilities were that he had merely gone to some station up or down the line—probably to Southend—to post a package which he was anxious should not bear the Canvey postmark.

Another reason was that, as I could not ask for an arrest merely upon suspicion, it was quite possible that, in order to obtain the necessary evidence, I might have to keep an eye upon Mullen for some time to come. By shadowing him upon the present occasion, I ran the risk of being seen and recognised, which would not so much matter in the case of Quickly. Then again, it was highly desirable that I should pay my surprise visit to the *Cuban Queen* in the absence of the suspected party, and if I neglected to do so on the present occasion, I might not get another opportunity.

If I could satisfy myself, by a visit to the hulk, that the person who had been concealed there was really a woman, I need trouble my-

self no further about the vessel and its occupants. But if, on the other hand, I found evidence which went to prove that the supposed Mrs. Hughes was of the male sex, I should have good cause to believe that I had indeed discovered the hiding-place of the redoubtable James Mullen.

My last reason was that, at the moment when I was called upon so hurriedly to make decision, I was wearing a Norfolk shooting jacket and knickerbockers. This costume, especially in the streets of London, would render me conspicuous, and in fact would be the worst possible attire for so ticklish a job as that of shadowing a suspect, whereas Quickly's dress would attract no attention either in town or in country.

I have asked my readers to take me into their confidence, and to face with me the dilemma in which I was placed, because I am in hopes that most of them will admit that, under the circumstances, and especially in view of the conspicuous dress I happened to be wearing, I acted rightly. Those who so decide will not be too hard upon me when I confess that, in allowing myself to lose sight of the person who had been in hiding on the hulk, I made, as events proved, a fatal and, but for other circumstances, an irretrievable mistake. That I am but a bungler at best is, I fear, already only too evident,

though I make bold to say that it is not often I bungle so badly as I did on this occasion. The results of that bungle—results big with consequences to others and to myself—were two-fold. The first was that Quickly never returned from the quest upon which I had despatched him. From that day to this no word of him has been received. He simply disappeared as completely, as if the earth had opened and swallowed him. The second was that he was companioned in his disappearance by the person whom I had instructed him to follow. James Mullen, if James Mullen it were, did not come back to the hulk, and I had after a time to admit to myself that, so far as Canvey Island and the *Cuban Queen* were concerned, "the game was up."

CHAPTER XII

HOW CAPTAIN SHANNON'S AUTOGRAPH CAME INTO MY POSSESSION

THE set back I had received, so far from causing me to abandon my search for Mullen, only nerved me to fresh endeavour, though how to go to work I could not for some time determine. To threaten Hughes that I would report him to the authorities unless he made terms for himself by telling me all he knew about his mysterious visitor, was not a course which commended itself to me. I might—in the event of everything else failing—be compelled to so bold a step, but for the present I felt that the wisest thing I could do would be to trace Quickly's movements, after he had started to shadow the person who had come ashore from the hulk. This would, however, necessitate my leaving Canvey, and in the meantime it was of the highest importance that an eye should be kept upon the *Cuban Queen*.

It was quite within the bounds of possibility

that Mullen might yet return, in which case he would probably do so by night. Hence it was at night that I kept my keenest watch upon the hulk, and, in order to do this, I thought it advisable to leave the inn and to instal myself in a small furnished cottage, which, by an unexpected stroke of luck, I was able to rent very cheaply. But as I could not pursue my inquiries in regard to the fate of Quickly, and keep an eye at the same time upon the *Cuban Queen*, I decided to send for a friend of mine, named Grant, whom I could trust implicitly.

Grant took the next train to Benfleet—the nearest station to Canvey—on receiving my telegram, and after hearing my story, assured me of his readiness and willingness to co-operate in the search for Mullen. He promised to keep an unwinking eye upon the *Cuban Queen* while I was away, and to let me know should any suspicious stranger come upon the scene. The matter being thus satisfactorily arranged, I started off to inquire into the fate of Quickly.

My theory was that that luckless wight had so clumsily performed the work of shadowing as to bring himself under the notice of the person shadowed, who would then have reason to believe that the secret of his hiding-place was known—at all events to one person. Under

such circumstances, Mullen would no doubt at once decide that the surest means, by which to ensure the return of the secret to his own keeping, would be to despatch Quickly to the limbo of the "dead folk" who "tell no tales"; and I felt tolerably certain that, on discovering he was being shadowed, the conspirator had led the way to some secluded spot where he or his accomplice had made an end of the shadower.

How I set to work to collect and to sift my evidence, I need not here describe in detail. Let me, instead, sum up briefly the result of my inquiries.

Quickly had reached the station some minutes before the arrival of any other passenger, and, in accordance with my instructions, had gone to the general waiting-room, and remained there until the train was starting. Soon after a woman, carrying a bag, had entered the station. She proceeded to take a third-class single ticket to Stepney, and, when the train drew up at the platform, seated herself in an empty carriage near the centre, Quickly getting into a smoking-carriage at the end. When the train reached Stepney the woman passed through the barrier, followed at some distance by a man answering to the description of Quickly.

The woman then bought an evening paper from a newsboy, and, crossing the road slowly,



“‘Another throw back, Grant,’ I said, when I entered the cottage.”
Captain Shannon.

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turned down a by-street which led to the river. The man, after looking in a tobacconist's window for half a minute, took the same turning, but upon the other side of the road.

There I came to a dead stop, for no jot of evidence, in regard to the subsequent movements of either, could I discover, and reluctant though I am to admit myself beaten, the fact that in that direction also I was check-mated could no longer be disguised.

"Another throw back, Grant," I said when I entered the cottage at Canvey after this fresh reverse.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" inquired my friend and collaborator when he had heard my story. "Give it up, as we did the riddles of our schoolboy days?"

"Give it up! What do you take me for? But, hollo! For whom is that letter?" I said, pointing to an envelope which was lying on the table.

"For you. Hardy Muir brought it over. It was sent under cover to him from London."

"At last!" I said, breaking the seal. "It's from Green, the detective whom I put on to ferret out Mullen's past. I told him that if he wanted to write, he was to slip the letter into an envelope addressed to Muir at the Savage Club, Adelphi Terrace. He's been long enough find-

ing anything out. Let's hear what he has to say, now he does condescend to write. It is dated from Baxenham, near Yarby. I knew the place well, years ago—used to yacht round there as a lad. Nasty coast, too, with some curious currents and very dangerous sands. Here's his letter."

"MAX RISSLER, ESQ

"DEAR SIR,—When you asked me to see what I could find out about James Mullen, I did not expect to turn up anything much in the way of trumps. But, sir, I always act honourable, and I have found something which I think is valuable. It is so valuable, and the reward offered for the capture of James Mullen is so big, that I cannot afford to part with the information to any one else. So I ask you, sir, as man to man, to let me withdraw from your service. The man that finds Mullen has got his fortune made, and what I have discovered ought to be worth twenty-five thousand pounds to me. I could have gone on taking your money, as you allow for exs., and kept my mouth shut, but I want to act honourable, believing as you have always acted honourable by me. So, sir, I beg to give notice that I withdraw from your service as regards the aforesaid James Mullen, and hope you will not take offence. My exs. up to the present as I have drawn in your pay are

thirty-one pounds. If you will take my I O U, and I find Mullen, I will pay you back double money. But if you say you must have the money, I can get it. I hope you will take the I O U, as I want my money just now, and oblige. Sir, I am on the track.

"Your obedient servant,

"JAMES BAKEWELL GREEN.

"P.S.—My address is c/o Mrs. Brand, Elm Cottage, Baxenham."

"What a rascal!" said Grant, when I had finished this letter. "He ought to say he's on the 'make' as well as on the track."

"I don't think he's a rascal," I answered. "I have always found him above board and square. If he is really on Mullen's heels, the temptation to turn his discovery to his own account is pretty strong. Twenty-five thousand pounds, not to speak of the kudos, isn't made every day, my boy. It's rather like shaking an apple tree that somebody else may pick up the fruit, to do the work, and then see another man go off with the money bags. No, I think he's acted honourably in giving me due notice that he's going to run the show himself, and in offering to return the exs., as he calls them. Many men would have gone on taking the coin while working on their own account."

"What are you going to do?" queried Grant.

to his breast—then the little boy would creep downstairs again, dry-eyed, but sad at heart, with a strange sense of loneliness and of loss.

As I sat there, watching the last of the sunset, that little boy seemed to look at me out of the past with desolate, reproachful eyes, asking what the man had to give the boy in exchange for his dreams. Then a bat flew by—so closely that I felt the cold fanning of its wings upon my face, so suddenly that I drew back with a start, and awoke to real life again.

Evening was already closing in. An hour ago the setting sun had looked out over the horizon's edge, and flooded the stretch of meadowland—now so gloomy and grey—with a burst of luminous gold which tipped every grass-blade and daisy-head with fire. Now on the same horizon's edge the gusty night-rack was gathering. The glory and the glamour were gone, and darkness was already abroad. A wind which struck a chill to the heart moaned eerily over the meadows, and white mists blotted out bush and tree.

If Baxenham was to be reached before night-fall, I had no time to lose; so, with a sigh for the vanished sunset and my vanished dreams, I rose to continue my walk.

Another field and a thickly-wooded plantation, and then, as I turned a bend where the path wound round among the trees, I found myself



Captain Shannon.]

" I drew the dead man up upon the sands. "



upon the sea-beach along which my road lay. In front, about a couple of miles away, I could see the church tower of Baxenham, over which red Mars burned large and lurid among a score of tiny stars that quivered near him, like arrow-heads shot wide of the mark; and low in the west the slender moon was like a finger laid—to command silence—on the lip of night. The beauty of the scene so possessed me that I stood still an instant with face turned seaward and bared head, and then—almost at my feet—I saw lying in the water a dark body that stirred and rocked and stretched forth swaying arms like a creature at play. For one moment I thought it was alive—that it was some strange sea-beast seeking to regain its native element, but in the next I knew it for the body of a man, lying face downward and evidently dead.

There is horror enough in the silent and stone-cold stillness of death; but to see death put on the semblance of life, to see—as I did that night, when the in-coming tide, mocking at death, sported cruel and cat-like with its victim—dead arms reach and a dead body stir and sway, is surely more horrible still!

With hands scarcely warmer than his, I drew the dead man up upon the sands, and turned him upon his back, that I might see his face. It was the face of Green, the Inquiry Agent, and in his clenched fist he held a small green

bottle, which was lashed to his wrist by a handkerchief worked with his own initials, "J. B. G." "Suicide!" I whispered to myself, as I stooped to untie the handkerchief and bend back the unresisting fingers. The bottle was short and stumpy. It had a wide mouth, closed by a glass stopper secured by a string, and was labelled "Lavender Salts." I cut the string, and, drawing out the stopper, held the thing to my nose. "It *is* lavender salts," I said, "or has been, for it's light enough to be empty. No, there's something inside it still. Let's see what it is"; and with that I turned the bottle, mouth downward, over my open palm. A slip of neatly-folded paper fell out, which I hastily opened. Four words were printed upon it in rude capitals—

"BY ORDER.—CAPTAIN SHANNON."

CHAPTER XIII

I POSSESS MYSELF OF THE SECRET OF JAMES
BAKEWELL GREEN

WHEN I look back upon that moment, I find myself wondering at the singular effect which the discovery of the dead man's identity had upon my nerves. It turned them in a second's space from quivering and twitching strings to cords of iron. It acted upon my brain as a cold douche acts upon the body. It was as if a man had staggered, heavy with drink, to a pump, and, after once dipping his head under the tap, had come up perfectly sober. The mental effect was equally curious. I do not think I am in a general way unsympathetic or indifferent to the misfortunes of others, but no dairymaid, working out the losses and profits of a week's buttermaking, could have set about her calculations more calmly, than I did when I asked myself whether my enterprise would be advantaged or disadvantaged by Green's untimely end.

My first procedure was to secure the piece of paper which I had found in the bottle. "I may want Captain Shannon's autograph one of

these days," I said to myself; "and even were it not so, I should be unwise to leave this document upon the scene. If, when the body is found, it is believed that Green was drowned by misadventure, there is less chance of awkward questions being asked, and inconvenient inquiries made. The fact that he has been engaged, by my directions, in investigating Mullen's antecedents may, in the course of such inquiries, come to light, and this I am, for several reasons, anxious to avoid.

"And now another thing. I'm afraid Green's papers have been taken by the murderer, otherwise I ought to secure them. They might contain a clue to the secret to which the poor man attached such importance. Ah! I thought so; they're gone, for the pocket-book, which I know he carried, is missing, although his watch, chain, money, and other belongings are left. But stop a minute! When I gave Green my address, I remember he took out his cigar-case, removed the cigars, and showed me that the case had a secret pocket for papers. He said that he never carried important papers in a pocket-book, which is the first thing a thief or a rogue who wishes to abstract a document looks for, and that he had had his taken from him twice—once by force, and once by a cunning theft.

"But Mullen would not know that Green

kept documents in his cigar-case, and probably wouldn't trouble to take it. Let me see. Yes, here it is, in the breast pocket, and I *think* I can feel papers inside the silk lining. We'll look at them by-and-by. Anything else in his pockets that I might require? No. Then I'll slide the body back into the water. He's evidently been dead many hours, and it can make no difference to him, poor fellow. That's it. He's just as he was when I found him. Now I'll be off. Good-night, Mr. James Bakewell Green. I won't press you for that I O U."

Still wondering at my heartlessness, I turned and walked in the direction of Yarby. But I had more important matters than my own mental attitude to consider, for the first question which I had to ask myself was, "By whose hand did Green meet his end?" It was of course possible that he had committed suicide, or that the paper bearing the signature of "Captain Shannon" had been placed where I found it by some one who, for reasons of his own, had taken Green's life, and hoped by attributing the crime to another person to divert suspicion from himself. But I soon decided that neither of these explanations was worth consideration. For the motive of the murder, one had not far to look. Green had, on his own showing, discovered something which might lead to Captain Shannon's arrest, and

there could be no doubt that, should the fugitive get wind of this, his first step would be to rid himself of so dangerous an enemy.

From the circumstance under which I discovered the body of my unfortunate agent, I came to the conclusion that he was on board a yacht when the crime was effected.

Being familiar with the neighbourhood, I knew that the place where I had found the body of the murdered man was the very spot towards which, with every incoming tide, a strong current sets, so the probabilities were that the corpse had been carried thither from the open sea. That it had not been placed where it was by any one on shore—at all events since the outgoing tide—was evident from the fact that mine were the only foot-marks on the soft smooth stretch of sandy mud which led down to the water's edge. But what struck me as peculiarly strange was that, though Green was otherwise fully dressed, he was wearing no boots. It was very unlikely that he had walked for two miles with bare feet along a stony beach. But if he had, for any reason, been persuaded to go on board a yacht, it was quite possible that he might have taken off his boots. No yacht owner who prides himself upon the trimness of his craft, and the whiteness of her decks, cares to have a visitor tramping about in heavy, and,



“He had, in all probability, been the victim of foul play.”

Captain Shannon.

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perhaps, muddy boots; nor would a landsman, so shod, find it easy to make good his foothold upon the slippery decks of a small vessel. My theory was that Green had been decoyed upon a yacht under some pretext, or that he had been foolhardy enough to go on board of his own accord—perhaps in the hope of obtaining further and final evidence of Mullen's identity, or, it may be, with the idea of achieving the fugitive's arrest. Once on board, he had, in all probability, been the victim of foul play. Very likely, when his back was turned, he had been stunned by a blow on the head, after which he had been carried out to sea, where he could be despatched at leisure, and without risk of his cries being heard, or the act witnessed, as might be the case on land. After that, the bottle containing the paper inscribed "By Order.—Captain Shannon," had been fastened to his wrist, and the body cast adrift, to serve as a warning to others like him who might elect to enter the lists against the arch-assassin. But, apart from the question of the manner in which Green had met his end, I had to recognise that, if his body were found while I was in the neighbourhood, and foul play were suspected, I, as a stranger, might be called upon to give an account of myself, and might even be arrested upon suspicion. Hence I decided to return to town without delay, but as the

crime might at any moment be discovered, and an alarm raised, I thought that to carry about with me an article which could be identified as the dead man's property, would be highly inadvisable, and that I should do well to investigate the cigar-case and to get rid of it at once.

Two neatly-folded sheets of paper—a diagram and a letter—were concealed in the secret pocket, and a glance at them satisfied me that they were the documents of which I was in search.

CHAPTER XIV

A LETTER TO JAMES MULLEN

AS I could not secure a carriage to myself in the train by which I returned to town, I had to defer a closer examination of the papers I had found until I had gained the seclusion of my own chambers in Buckingham Street.

The first of the documents contained in Green's cigar-case was a letter, evidently addressed to Mullen. It was dated from "Stavanger, Norway," and ran as follows:—

"James,—I know all. I have never tried to spy into your affairs, but I have known for a long time that you have been engaged in some secret undertaking, which I felt sure was for no good purpose. Your sudden disappearances and equally sudden reappearances, and the large sums of money you have had, have always been a source of anxiety to me. That it was some political plot you were engaged in, I was certain, for before me you were not at such pains to disguise your real views as you

were before others. I remember your wild talk about society having conspired to rob you from before your birth;—of your being denied the right to bear your father's name, and of your mother's name being a dishonour to you. That your father was a villain to our mother I know, and it may be that from him you inherit your evil tendencies, and that God may not hold you morally responsible for them. But, James, bad as your father must have been, he was, after all, your father, and the language you sometimes used about him has made me, who am used to your violence, shudder and turn sick.

"James, I promised our dead mother on her death-bed that I would try to be to you all that she was to you. She could do almost as she liked with you—could soften you and turn you from evil, as no other person in the world could. There was some strange sympathy between you two. Perhaps your knowledge of her one and only sin made you tender and chivalrous to her, just as it sometimes—God forgive me!—made me, who am so different from you and her, hard. And perhaps her memory of her one sinning made her gentle and tender to you in your many sinnings. I have had children of my own since then, James, and I think something has thawed in my heart that was cold as ice before.

"I remember that in those childish days, when you would come to our mother after some wild and wicked deed, she would take you in her arms, and speak softly to you, and that you would become another creature, and would seek to undo the evil you had done. But I used to become impatient. I demanded that you should be punished, and I remember that my words would turn you to stone again, and bring that hard glitter, that I so hated, into your eyes. Yes, and when I saw her caressing you, whom I would have had flogged, I used to feel—though she was my mother as well as yours—as if I were a stranger in the house, and could not be of the same flesh and blood as you and she.

"That is long ago, James, and we are no longer boy and girl, but man and woman. But my heart tells me that I have not kept my promise to our dead mother.

"She said to me when she was dying:

"Mary, I am afraid for James. He can be chivalrously generous to those who appeal to his protection; he can be heartlessly cruel to those who oppose his will. You remember how as a boy he fought like a wild cat with two lads, twice his size, in defence of the homeless cur that crawled to his feet when they were stoning it; and you remember, too, that upon the same day, because his own dog

snarled at him, he beat it about the head so mercilessly with the butt of a heavy whip that we had to kill it. Mary, I am afraid for James. I am the one and only soul in this world—where, young as he is, he feels himself an outcast—who understands him. And everything depends upon his associations. He might be a good man or he might be a criminal. Mary, promise me you will not be too hard with him—promise me that you will try to understand him, and to make allowances and to be gentle.'

"I promised her that I would do so, James, and I meant to keep my promise; but I know now that I have not done so. I did not grudge you money. I gave you more of what my father left to me than I kept. But I did not try to be to you what I promised our mother I would be. I know now that I have not done so. I have reason to know it, for my little son, Stanley, looks up at me with *your* eyes to reproach me with my broken promise. What *you* once were, *he* now is, in looks and in disposition. I fear for him as your mother feared for you; and his mother knows now that the promise I made to your mother, I did not keep.

"James, if you have done evil, I am greatly to blame. If I had kept my promise, if I had tried to take our dead mother's place in your life, if I had aimed at being your companion,

and at winning your confidence, if I had sought to keep evil influences away, and to set good influences at work, you might never have formed the associations you have formed. That you have done the things they lay to your charge, I cannot believe. I have seen the *Daily Record* and the portrait, and I know only too well, in spite of the disguise, that the James Mullen who is accused of being Captain Shannon is my half-brother James. I will never believe—nothing will make me believe—that it is really true, and that you are responsible for the inhuman crimes which you are said to have committed, or to have caused to be committed. That you are associated with men who are capable of any wickedness is, I fear, only too true; men who, by flattering that fatal vanity of yours, which I know so well—that constitutional craving to be thought important and a power, of which I can see traces in the Manifesto which was published after the explosion—have made you their tool, and have persuaded you to accept responsibilities for actions in which you had no hand, I can readily believe. But that you, whom I have known to do such chivalrous actions—you whom I have seen empty your pockets to relieve some beggar whose woebegone looks had appealed to your pity—could deliberately plan the murder of hundreds of inoffensive people, I cannot and never will believe.

conditions we impose, he will help you to get out of the country. But he will do nothing until he has received that promise, so send us a line at once.

“And now, James, as it is quite possible that I may die before then, and never see you again, I wish to make one last and, perhaps, dying request. You know how nobly my dear father acted when he found out about you—how, to save our mother’s reputation, he gave out that you were his nephew, whom he intended to adopt as his son. James, for his sake, for my sake, for our dead mother’s sake, promise me that, should you be arrested, you will never let our connection with you be known. It could do you no good, and it would mean that our mother’s guilty secret would come out, and my innocent children would be disgraced and dishonoured throughout their lives by her shame and your guilt. If you have one spark of natural affection left in your heart you will promise me this.—Your broken-hearted sister,

“F.”

CHAPTER XV

A DOCUMENT OF IMPORTANCE

IT was a copy, not the original, of this pitiful letter, which I found in the cigar case, as was evident from the fact that the document was in Green's handwriting.

To me this seemed somewhat significant. It pointed to the conclusion that Green had, in some way, contrived to intercept Mullen's correspondence, and, after making himself acquainted with the contents of the various letters, had carefully resealed them, and taken steps to ensure their being forwarded to the person to whom they were addressed. That he must have had some reason for not retaining in his possession so valuable a piece of evidence as Mrs. Burgoyne's letter, was very clear, and after thinking the matter over I put the following interpretation upon the facts.

Although Mullen had given an address to which letters might be sent to him by his sister, it was not likely that he himself was actually to be found at that address. On the contrary it was more than probable that he

had arranged some complicated and round-about system of reforwarding correspondence, so that even if the address, to which letters were being sent, should come to the knowledge of the police, they would have to discover the address to which each communication had been reforwarded, and perhaps again reforwarded, before they could come to the actual hiding-place of the fugitive, who in the meantime might hear of what was going on, and would promptly decide that it was high time for him to change his quarters. And I felt tolerably sure that his manner of making a change would be like that of certain sea-fowl, who, upon the approach of an enemy, dive out of sight beneath the water, where they twist and turn, and eventually come up, far out of reach and range, and in every other direction than that in which they are looked for.

Hence, though Green had succeeded in intercepting or obtaining access to Mullen's correspondence, it was quite possible that he had been no nearer to discovering the criminal's actual whereabouts. But if he merely took a copy of Mrs. Burgoyne's letter, and then let it go on to Mullen, the latter would very likely fall into the trap of keeping the appointment which he had made with his sister, and could then be arrested and handed over to justice. For though his sister—lest the letter should

fall into other hands than those for which it was intended—had cautiously refrained from mentioning her own or her husband's name, or from giving any address, except that of a foreign town, she had, woman-like, forgotten that there were not likely to be many large steam yachts, belonging to an English gentleman, whose wife was in bad health, lying, at the same moment, off such a place as Stavanger. An experienced inquiry agent, like Green, would have no difficulty in ascertaining the name of such a vessel, as well as the name of its owner. That he had taken steps to obtain the necessary information was very clear from the second document which I found in his cigar case. Here it is—

Viscount Dungan-	}	and	}	Mary Hatherwick
non, shot in				Coyne, daughter of
U.S.A. in 1881,				John Coyne, Esq.,
				of Galway,
				had son,
				known as James Cross, who afterwards
				assumed the name of James Mullen.

—:—

This Mary Hath-	}	was	}	Henry Cross
erwick Coyne				afterwards
(d. 1880)				married to

By him she had daughter,
 Flora Hatherwick Cross, b. 1865;
 m. in 1885 to Stanley Burgoyne, Esq.

The meaning of this document—a document which affords some interesting data to the student of heredity—evidently was that the man calling himself James Mullen, *alias* Captain Shannon, was the illegitimate son of the famous, and also infamous, Lord Dungannon by a Miss Mary Coyne, the daughter of an Irish gentleman. The fact that Miss Coyne had given birth to a child had probably been kept a secret, for, if Green's notes were correct, she had afterwards married a Mr. Henry Cross, by whom she had a daughter, Flora (now Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne), who was therefore Mullen's half-sister, and the writer of the letter, of which I had found a copy in Green's cigar case.

How Green had contrived to discover the address to which Mullen was having his letters sent, there was no evidence to show. Whether it was due to a singularly lucky fluke or to his own astuteness, we are not likely ever to know, but once possessed of such information, it would be easy enough—after reading the letter which let him into the secret of the fugitive's connection with Mrs. Burgoyne—to ferret out the facts which he had brought to light about Mullen's parentage. To have intercepted Mullen's letters must have been more difficult. If Green had been an official from Scotland Yard, he would no doubt have been allowed

to intercept letters, written by or addressed to suspected persons, but that the postal authorities would permit a private inquiry agent to tamper with their mail bags was not to be entertained. That Green was staying in the same house as Mullen, and was able, in that way, to lay hands on the latter's correspondence, was very unlikely. Nor was it likely that my late inquiry agent had succeeded in bribing a postman, for though it may not be impossible to find dishonest postmen, the odds are very much against finding the dishonest man in the one particular office with the mails of which one wishes to tamper.

A far more probable theory was that which had at first occurred to me, namely, that the letters had been directed to the care of a tobacconist, or, more likely still, of a hairdresser. It is matter of common knowledge that many hairdressers add to their business-takings by allowing letters, on each of which a fee of one penny is charged, to be addressed to their care. Though generally implying a not very creditable connection, these letters are, as a rule, of no more criminal character than assignments with people to whom the recipient has thought it unadvisable to give his real name and address, or whose letters he is anxious should not come under the notice of his family.

If Green had intercepted Mullen's letters at a tobacconist's shop, the first thing to find out was where that tobacconist's shop was situated, and the only way to do so would be to trace my inquiry agent's recent movements. Hence I decided that I could not do better than run down to Yarby again, and see what was to be learned about him there. But before I could do this with safety, I should have to ascertain whether Green's body had been found, and whether suspicions of foul play were entertained, as in that case it would not be advisable to visit the neighbourhood just then.

The point was, however, satisfactorily settled for me next morning, for, on opening my *Daily News*, I read the following announcement:—

“SAD DEATH FROM DROWNING.—Mr. James Bakewell Green, a visitor from London, was accidentally drowned at Baxenham, near Yarby, yesterday. The body was discovered late last night on the beach by the Baxenham rural postman. From the fact that the unfortunate man was wearing no boots, it is supposed that he had taken them off in order to pursue the pastime—so popular among Cockney visitors to the seaside—of paddling among the small pools left by the last tide. Dr. Ellis, who examined the body, is of opinion that, while so engaged, the deceased was overcome by faint-

ness, and was drowned in quite shallow water, the corpse being subsequently washed up upon the beach by the incoming tide. An inquest will be held."

Five minutes after I had read this paragraph, I was on my way to catch the next train to Yarby. Green had given his address as "Care of Mrs. Brand, Elm Cottage, Baxenham," and my first step was to interview that lady under the pretext of being a Press representative, who had run down to make inquiries about her late lodger. From Mrs. Brand I learned, among other facts, that Green had been in the habit of paying frequent visits to Cotley, a small town some twenty miles inland.

To Cotley I accordingly betook myself, and, curiously enough, the first thing that caught my eye, after leaving the station, was the legend, "Letters Taken," displayed in the window of a tobacconist's shop, immediately fronting the booking-office entrance. The door was closed, but, as I pushed it open, a bell overhead announced my arrival.

I found myself in a shop, with another room beyond, on the swing-doors of which were the words, "To the Hairdressing Saloon." There was no one behind the counter, nor, so far as I could see, was there any one in the hair-cutting rooms. But on the counter before me

lay half a dozen letters, apparently thrown there by an impatient postman, who could not wait for the proprietor's return. One of them was for "Mr. James Bakewell Green," the inscription being in his own handwriting; another was addressed in a woman's hand to "Mr. Henry Jeanes," and I saw that it bore a Norwegian stamp and the Stavanger postmark. Could "Henry Jeanes" be the name under which James Mullen was having letters sent to him?

CHAPTER XVI

HENRY JEANES, ALIAS JAMES MULLEN

IT was raining heavily when the train drew up at the Cotley platform, and as I did not know how far I might have to walk, I put up my umbrella when leaving the station, only to close it again as I entered the hairdresser's shop. I was holding the umbrella in my hand when my eye caught sight of the two letters, and by a turn of the wrist I swept both into its folds. Then, as I turned round, I saw a man without a hat, and wearing a white apron, slip out of the door of a public-house opposite, and run hastily across the road towards the shop, wiping his mouth with his hand while he did so.

As I expected, he was the proprietor of the establishment, and after wishing me good-morning, and apologising for being out of the way by explaining that he had been across the road to borrow a postage stamp, he proceeded to tuck me up in a white sheet preparatory to cutting my hair.

The demand for postage stamps had appa-

rently been heavy that afternoon, and the task of affixing them had no doubt resulted in an uncomfortable dryness of the mouth, which necessitated the frequent use of liquid. Under the circumstances I considered this rather fortunate than otherwise, for the man was not unaware of his condition, and did his best to palliate it by being so obligingly communicative, in regard to any question I asked him, that I could, had I wished it, have acquainted myself with all that he knew about every customer who patronised his establishment.

"You have letters addressed here sometimes, don't you?" I asked as he was brushing my hair.

"Yes, sir, we have letters addressed here," he made answer; "but strictly confidential of course," whispering this in my ear with drunken gravity, and adding, after a pause, and with a meaning leer, "And very convenient too, under certain circumstances. Is there any little thing you can do for us in that way yourself, sir? If so we should be happy to accept your commission."

The only little thing I was minded to do for him was to kick him, and that right heartily, but repressing the unregenerate desire of the natural man, I affected to be thinking the matter over, and then replied—

"Why, yes, I think you might. My name

is Smithers—Alfred John Smithers. So if any letters, addressed to that name, come here, you'll know they are for me, won't you?"

"Certainly," he said. "Only too happy to oblige a customer at any time. Living here, sir?"

"Staying for a week or so," I answered, "and I may perhaps come to live, but am not sure yet. By the bye, do you ever get any letters for my friend Mr. Henry Jeanes?"

"Mr. Henry Jeanes?—oh yes, sir. And you are the *second* gentleman that's asked me the same question. Mr. Green he asked me as well."

"Mr. James Bakewell Green?" I said. "Oh, yes; he is a friend of mine too."

"Indeed, sir!" (This with a deprecatory cough, as if he did not think much of the late Mr. Green, and was inclined, in consequence, to reconsider any favourable opinion he might have formed of myself.) "Curious gentleman, Mr. Green. Never bought nothing in the shop, Mr. Green didn't. Most gentlemen, as have their letters addressed here, take a bottle of our hair wash, now and then, for the good of the house; but Mr. Green, he never had as much as a stick of shaving soap at any time. He was always asking questions, too, as I told Mr. Jeanes."

"Oh," I said, beginning to see daylight, in regard to the means by which Mullen had got

to know that Green was making inquiries about him. "How did you come to mention the matter to Mr. Jeanes?"

"Mr. Jeanes left particular word, sir, that if anybody asked after him, we were to be sure and let him know."

"I see," I said. "And when do you expect Mr. Jeanes to call again?"

"Mr. Jeanes never calls, sir. We haven't ever seen him. He sent us instructions that all letters that come for him were to be put in an envelope, and sent to him at Professor Lawrance's Haircutting Establishment at Stanby, and we were to let him know if any one asked after him."

At that moment, the bell in the tobacconist shop outside, announced the entrance of a customer, and two young men, pushing open the swing door of the hairdressing saloon, seated themselves to await their turn.

Under the circumstances, and especially as I had learnt all I required, I did not think it wise to ask further questions, but I had a particular reason—which the reader shall shortly hear—for wishing to possess a specimen of the handwriting in which the letters that were sent on to Henry Jeanes, at Professor Lawrance's establishment, Stanby, were directed.

"Can you spare me a second in the outside shop?" I said to the hairdresser.

"With pleasure, sir," he answered, following me out. "What can we do for you?"

"Look here!" I said, pushing half a sovereign towards him over the counter, "that's for your trouble in letting me have my letters addressed to your care. And now another matter. I've not been very well to-day, and want to see a doctor. Who's the best man to go to?"

"Dr. Carruthers, Devonshire House, Grayland Road. Best doctor in the town, sir," he responded.

"Would you mind writing it down for me? I've got a beastly memory."

"By all means, sir," he said, producing a bottle of ink, a pen, and a sheet of paper from a drawer. "That's it, sir. Much obliged. I'll be very careful about the letters, and good day, sir."

I saw making a delivery in the street where the shop whence I had obtained the two letters was situated.

"What's this?" he inquired, when he had looked at it.

"You dropped it when making your last round," I answered.

He looked surprised at first, and then suspicious. "I don't remember seeing that letter when I sorted my delivery," he said; "and I ain't in the habit of dropping letters in the street—been at it too long for that. How do I know this ain't a put up job?"

"Give it me back at once, you insolent fellow," I replied, "and I'll do what I ought to have done at first—take it to the head office, and report you to the postmaster for negligence. I go out of my way to do you a courtesy, and perhaps save you from getting into trouble for carelessness in the execution of your duty, and I get insulted for my pains. Give it me back, or come with me to the head office, and we'll soon put this matter right."

"I humbly ask your pardon, and hope there is no offence, sir, I am sure," he answered, with a change of manner which showed that he did not relish the threat of being reported for negligence. "I'll see the letter's delivered all right, and I'm much obliged to you, sir, I am sure, and hope you won't think no more of it."

"I'm not sure that I oughtn't to take the letter to the office now," I said. "However, I don't want to get a man into trouble for an accident, but keep a civil tongue in your head another time, young man, or you'll not get off so cheaply as you have this."

He touched his cap, and promising to profit by my advice, slipped the letter among the others, so, wishing him good-day, I entered a stationer's shop, and purchased a couple of envelopes and two sheets of paper. Each sheet of paper I folded, and put into an envelope, which I then addressed, in pencil, to myself, at the post office, Stanby, and posted, after which I made my way to the station and took a ticket to the same town.

As I had to wait some time for a train, and to change at two junctions, it was late when I reached Stanby. I had some difficulty in finding Professor Lawrance's Haircutting Establishment, which was in a side street, and was already closed for the night. On the other side of the way, only a few doors down, was a not very clean-looking Temperance Hotel and Coffee Palace. Here I secured a bedroom and sitting-room, from the latter of which, as it faced the street, I could keep an eye upon every one who entered or left the Professor's saloon.

I then went to bed, but next morning I was

up early, and called at the post office, where the two envelopes which I had posted at Cotley on the preceding day awaited me. These I took to my room at the hotel, and, having bought a piece of india-rubber on the way, I rubbed out the pencilled name and address, after which I re-addressed the envelopes in ink to Mr. Henry Jeanes, at Professor Lawrance's Haircutting Rooms, Stanby—imitating as closely as possible the handwriting of the barber at Cotley, of whose caligraphy I had secured a specimen.

Why did I trouble to post at Cotley two letters addressed in pencil to myself at the post office, Stanby? And why, after calling for these letters, did I rub out the pencilled directions, and re-address both to Henry Jeanes, care of Professor Lawrance, Stanby? For the following reason. If a letter for Jeanes should be forwarded on, to Professor Lawrance's care, from Cotley—that letter it would be my business, by hook or by crook, to abstract. But to do this without attracting suspicion it would be necessary to have a dummy letter, with which to replace it, and the dummy would have to bear the Cotley postmark, and to be directed in a hand as much as possible resembling the handwriting on the original letter. How to manage this had puzzled me at first; for though I did not antici-

pate any difficulty in obtaining a specimen of the Cotley barber's handwriting, or in imitating that handwriting when obtained, I could not see how to get over the difficulty of the postmark. A postmark is not an easy thing to forge unless one has specially prepared tools; and until the idea occurred to me of posting, at Cotley, a letter addressed, in pencil, to myself at Stanby, and then rubbing out the direction, and re-addressing the letter to Jeanes, I was rather at a loss to know how to effect my purpose. However, the difficulty was now satisfactorily surmounted, and, armed with my dummy letters, I set out to make the acquaintance of Professor Lawrance.

He was an extremely unprepossessing, not to say ruffianly looking man, and regarded me with what I could not help thinking was a suspicious eye when I entered. I submitted to be shaved and shampooed, both of which operations he performed villainously, though he entertained me meanwhile with his views in regard to the winner of the Derby, and also of a prize-fight which was to come off that day.

"By the bye," I said, as I was drawing on my gloves, "can one have letters addressed here?"

"No," he replied shortly, "you can't. It don't pay—on the usual terms."

"I know that," I said, "or I shouldn't have asked you. But I'm willing to pay special terms."

"Is it 'orses?" he inquired gruffly.

"Yes, horses," I said, taking up the cue which he had given me; "but it's a fool's game, and I've lost a lot of money over it already."

"Ah!" with a grin. "And you've got a introduction, of course. I don't take on customers of that sort without a introduction. It ain't safe."

The affair was developing beyond my expectations, but, from what had transpired, I felt sure I should be safe in assuming that he was more of a betting agent than a barber. The wisest thing to do would be, by bluffing boldly, to lead him to suppose that I knew all about him, so I nodded assent as airily as possible, and as if his question had been a mere matter of course.

"Who is it?" he asked point-blank.

"Morrison," I replied, without a moment's hesitation — "Henry Morrison, of Doncaster. You recollect him? Tall man, clean-shaven and small eyes. Wears a fawn coat and a brown billycock. He said any money I put on with you would be safe."

The barber nodded. "Like as not, though I don't recollect 'im from your description. Well, what d'you want me to back?"

"Ah, that's what I wish *you* to tell me," I answered—this time at least with absolute truthfulness, for, as a matter of fact, I did not know so much as the name of one of the horses, or what was the race which we were supposed to be discussing.

"Greased Lightning's the lay," he said. "It's a dead cert. I can get level money now. It'll be four to two on to-morrow. 'Ow much are you going to spring?"

I replied that he could put a "flimsy" on for me; and after he had entered the amount and my name—which I gave as Henry Watson—in a greasy notebook, I wished him good-morning, promising to call again soon to see if there were any letters.

The rest of the day I spent, for the most part, in my bedroom, watching the customers who patronized Professor Lawrance's saloon. Nor was my vigil without result in assisting me to form an opinion as to the class of business which was there carried on. Scarcely a dozen persons entered the establishment during the day, and the majority of them had called neither to be shaved nor to have their hair cut. My reason for coming to this conclusion was not that I had such telescopic and microscopic eyes as to be able to detect in every case whether the caller had been under the barber's hand since his entrance, but because

most of Professor Lawrance's customers did not remain inside his shop more than half a minute, and because, too, I saw a letter in the hand of more than one of those who came out. And as the postman never passed the door without making a delivery, and the callers were all more or less horsey in dress and appearance, the evidence seemed to point pretty clearly to the fact that Professor Lawrance was, as I had already surmised, more of a betting agent than a barber.

I looked in next morning, ostensibly to be shaved, but in reality to get a peep at any letters which had come addressed to the Professor's care. That worthy forestalled me by gruffly volunteering the information that there were "No letters," nor could I succeed in leading the conversation to the subject in which I was interested.

The morning after, I waited until I saw some one, who looked more like a customer in search of a barber than of a betting agent, enter the shop, and I followed closely upon his heels. He had just seated himself to be shaved, so after wishing the Professor good-morning, and remarking that I was in no hurry, I took a seat close to the mantelshelf, and pretended to read the *Daily Telegraph*. It was on this mantelshelf, as I was aware, that the box containing the letters was kept, but, on

looking in that direction, I saw to my dismay that the mantelshelf had been cleared for the display of a big, coarsely coloured picture of "The Great Fight between Slade and Scroggins." The picture was labelled, "To be raffled for—the proceeds for the benefit of the Widow."

Whether this was intended as a delicate way of intimating that the conflict had proved fatal to one of the conflicting parties, or whether the widow in question was the relict of the artistic genius whose brain had conceived and whose hand had drawn the picture, I am unable to say, as particulars were not given. In regard to the details of the raffle, however, the promoters of the enterprise had condescended to be more explicit, as another label announced that the price of tickets was sixpence, and that they were "to be obtained of the Professor." I was, however, more concerned to know what had become of the letters. So—with the broad sheet of the *Daily Telegraph* interposed between myself and the too-inquisitive Professor—I scanned the room carefully, switching my eyes from object to object until they discovered the missing documents placed upon a rack which hung upon the wall near the window.

"It's very dark here, or else my sight's getting bad, and I shall have to take to glasses. I'll be hanged if I can read this small print,"

I said aloud, standing up and moving towards the window, as if to get a better light. For half a minute I pretended to read, and then, in order to reverse the sheet, I leisurely shook out the newspaper to its fullest extent, thus hiding myself completely from the Professor's eye.

As I did so, I took the opportunity of snatching the letters from the rack. It was no easy matter to shuffle through them with one hand, and without attracting attention, but I accomplished the task successfully, and not without result, for the bottom letter of the packet was for Mr. Henry Jeanes, and was in the handwriting of the barber at Cotley.

The reader will remember that I had prepared two envelopes, bearing the Cotley postmark, and addressed to Jeanes in as close an imitation of the barber's handwriting as possible. Into one of these envelopes I had that morning slipped a sheet of blank paper, on which was pasted a newspaper cutting with the report of the inquest on the body of poor Green (I had a reason for doing so which will shortly transpire), and this envelope I was at that moment carrying just inside my sleeve. To abstract the original letter and replace it by the dummy was the work of a few seconds. It was well that I had come thus prepared,

for, in the next instant, the Professor had snatched the packet from my hand, and was asking in a voice quivering with fury, "What the —— I meant by such impudence?"

"What's the excitement?" I said as innocently as possible. "I was only looking if there was one for me? There's no harm done."

"Oh, isn't there?" he said. "But there soon will be, if you get meddling 'ere again," and, with a swiftly-searching and darkly-suspicious glance at my face, he fell to examining the letters, and, as I could see by the movement of his lips, counting them, one by one, to see if any were missing. My heart, I must confess, jumped a bit when he came to the forgery with which I had replaced the letter I had abstracted. But the result was apparently satisfactory, for he put the packet back upon the rack without further comment, and took up the discarded shaving brush to continue his task.

I did not feel at the best of ease when, after the customer had paid and departed, a surly "Now then!" summoned me to the operating chair, for it was not altogether reassuring to have a razor, in the grip of such a ruffian, at one's throat. But though the shave was accomplished with none too light a hand, and the scoundrel drew blood by the probably in-

tentional and malicious way in which he rasped my somewhat tender skin, he did me no serious injury, and it was not long before I was back at the hotel and engaged in opening the abstracted packet.

There were two documents inside, the first of which was addressed to Jeanes, *alias* Mullen, in Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne's handwriting. It ran as follows:—

“JAMES,—We are glad to have your promise, and will carry out our part of the contract faithfully. We shall remain here, as you direct, until you telegraph the word ‘Come,’ when we shall start for England at once, and you can count on the yacht being at the place you mention within four days, and ready to start again at a few hours’ notice. We shall be just off the boat-builder’s yard where our little yacht is laid up.

“We do *not* see any necessity for doing as you suggest in regard to sending the present crew back to England, under the pretence that we are not likely to be using the yacht for some time; and then, after getting the ship’s appearance altered by repainting and rechristening her the name you mention, engaging another crew of Norwegians.

“This seems to us a very unnecessary precaution. Your connection with us is never

likely to be discovered, unless by your own confession. However, I suppose you know best, and we will do as you say.

"F."

The other letter was on a half-sheet of note-paper, and in the handwriting of the barber at Cotley. Here it is:—

"RESPECTED SIR,—Mr. Green has not called since I last wrote you. But a person named Smithers came, and asked questions. I did not like the look of him, and would not tell him anything, but said I did not know any Mr. Jeanes.—Respectfully,

"JAMES DORLEY.

"P.S.—Smithers smelt of rum. He had been drinking. He was a low-looking man, and I did not like his eye."

"I'm pained to hear you don't like my eye, Mr. Dorley," I said, putting the letter down and stealing a furtive sideways glance at a mirror on the wall, to see if I could detect any sinister expression in the feature in question. "And you didn't tell me anything, didn't you, you precious rascal? Some day I may have an opportunity of telling *you* something, and then it is possible you may find something else to dislike about me as well as my eye. In the meantime I'll take the liberty of detaining your letter. It would put Mullen on the alert

if I let it go on to him. His sister's letter he must have, for if I fail to lay hands on him here, I can take him when he keeps his appointment with her on board the steam yacht, by means of which he hopes to get out of the country. So I mustn't lose a moment in re-sealing her letter, and getting it back, by hook or by crook, to the letter-rack whence I got it. I'm not easy about the forgery with which I replaced it. If there had chanced to be only two or three letters waiting to be called for this morning, and I had abstracted one, without replacing it with a dummy, the Professor would undoubtedly have noticed that a letter was missing. But I'm running a risk in leaving the forged dummy there a moment longer than can be helped. Mullen might call for it, or it may get sent on; and though I flatter myself that the forgery is so well done that even Mullen is not likely to notice any difference in the handwriting, and though it is also possible that he would think the cutting about Green's death had been sent him by the Cotley barber, I'd much rather that the dummy didn't fall into his hands.

"To have forged a letter from the Cotley barber would have been extremely dangerous, for I didn't then know how the rascal addressed Mullen. And to have enclosed a blank sheet of paper would at once have suggested the trick

which had been played. The newspaper cutting was the only thing I could think of which had the look of being a *bond-fide* enclosure from the rascal at Cotley. He had to my knowledge informed Mullen that Green was inquiring about him, and what was more natural than that, seeing a notice of Green's death in the papers, he should send it on to his principal. But all the same, the sooner I get the dummy back into my own hands the better, for I don't think——"

At this point I broke off my meditations abruptly. I had been sitting in full view of Professor Lawrance's door, and, just then, I saw him put his head out, look up and down the street, as if to see whether he could safely be away for a few minutes without the probability of a customer popping in, and then cross the road in the direction of the nearest public-house.

"If I'm to make the exchange, it's now or never," I said, snatching up Mrs. Burgoyne's letter, which, after copying, I had put back into its envelope, and re-sealed.

In another half-minute I had crossed the road, and was ascending the stairs which led to Professor Lawrance's Haircutting Establishment.

CHAPTER XVIII

I BECOME A HAIRDRESSER'S ASSISTANT

TO return Mrs. Burgoyne's letter to the rack, and to pocket the dummy, did not take long, and, as no step upon the stair announced the Professor's return, I thought I might as well avail myself of his absence to ascertain the names of his other correspondents. Just when I had my hand upon the rack, however, a voice behind me said,—

"Wot a interest he do take in correspondence, to be sure. Be damned if he ain't at 'em again!" And as I turned round I saw the Professor in the act of closing the door, locking it, and putting the key in his pocket.

"Now, then, Mr. 'Enery Watson," he said, with an ugly look upon his face, "you and me 'as got to come to a understanding. You comes 'ere, very affable-like, a-wanting to back a 'orse, with a introduction from Mr. 'Enery Morrison o' Doncaster. Tall man, clean-shaved, small eyes, wore a fawn coat and a billycock 'at, did 'e? Ah! I knows 'im—Valker's 'is name.



"Wot a interest he do take in correspondence, to be sure!"

Captain Shannon.

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"'Orses!" he went on, with scorn too withering to be expressed on paper. "*You* know anythink about 'orses! Why, you sneakin goat, there ain't a knacker in the cats'-meat yard wot wouldn't put 'is 'eels in your face if 'e 'eard you talk about a gee-gee!"

He looked me up and down contemptuously, and then with a sudden accession of fury, and with the sneer in his voice changed to a snarl, said,—

"You come 'ere, do you, a-spying and a-prying, and takes rooms over the way to keep a watch upon me and my customers. And you want to get your 'and on them letters there, so as to find some evidence to lay information agin me, do you? Think I didn't know you was a-watchin' me through the Korfey Palis winder? That's wot I went out for. I knew as you'd be slippin' over 'ere direckly my back was turned. But I copped you, you slinkin' toad! and you ain't got nothink to lay information on; and I'll take care you don't!"

"My good man," I replied quite coolly, "don't distress yourself unnecessarily. I know very well that you are carrying on illegal transactions, and I could make things uncomfortable for you if I chose to give the police a hint. But I'm not a detective, and I don't concern myself, one way or the other, with your doings, legal or illegal. What I came here to find

out is purely a private family affair, and has nothing in the world to do with you or your betting business. A man whom I know has disappeared, and his family are anxious to get news of him. I've got an idea that he is in Stanby, and that he is having letters addressed to your care under an assumed name. Now look here. You've got it in your power to spoil my game, I admit; and I've got it in my power to give the police a hint that might be inconvenient to you. But why should you and I quarrel? Why shouldn't we do a little business together, to our mutual benefit? I can pay for any help you give, and, if you'll work with me, I'll guarantee that your name shan't be mentioned, and to keep my mouth shut about any little business transactions of your own which you're engaged in. Well, what is it to be? Will you accept my offer or not? You get nothing by refusing, and gain a good deal by accepting. You run this show to make money, and not for pleasure, I take it; and I'm ready to put a good deal more money in your pocket than you'd make in the general way, and not to interfere with your usual business, either. I shouldn't have supposed it wants much thinking about."

"Wot d'you call a good deal more money?" he asked shortly, but not without signs of coming to terms.

"Five, fifteen, or twenty pounds."

"Who is it you're after? Some of my pals I wouldn't give no one the bulge on, and some I don't care a crab's claw about."

"My man isn't one of your pals, I'm pretty sure, though I can't tell you his name—anyhow, not for the present," I answered. "But who are the pals you won't go back on?"

"Is it George Ray?"

"No."

"'Appy 'Arry?"

"No."

"Alf Mason?"

"No."

"Bob the Skinner?"

"No."

"Fred Wright?"

"No."

"Give us your twenty pound, then. I'm on. I don't care the price of 'arf a pint about none of the others."

"Not so fast, my friend. You've got to earn the money before you get it. And it'll depend on yourself whether it's ten, fifteen, or twenty sovereigns. Now listen to me. What I want you to do is to make an excuse for me to stay in your shop, so as to get a look at the people who come for letters. You must pretend to engage me as your assistant, and must fix me up in a white apron, and so on. If any one

ask questions, you can say I'm a young man who's come into a little money, and wants to drop it in starting a hairdressing establishment, and that you thought I might as well drop it with you as with any one else. You can tell them that you don't let me 'cut' any of your regular customers, but that I make myself useful by stropping the razors, lathering the 'shaves,' and practising haircutting on odd customers and schoolboys. I could do that much, I think, without betraying myself. The sooner we begin the better. Give me a white apron, if you've got one to spare, and I'll put it on straight off. Here's five pounds down to start with, and I'll give you another five for every week I'm here. Is it a bargain?"

"No, 'tain't. Ten pound down, and ten pound a week's my figger, and no less. I ain't a-going to injure my perfessional reputation by taking on amitoors to spoil my customers' 'eds of 'air, out of charity. Them's my terms. You can take 'em or leave 'em, as you like."

In the end, we compounded the matter for ten pounds down and five pounds weekly, and, having arrayed myself in a white apron and a canvas coat, which the Professor tossed me from a drawer, I assumed those badges of office—the shears, shaving-brush and comb—and took my place behind the second operating chair, to await customers and developments.

CHAPTER XIX

"ARE THERE ANY LETTERS FOR HENRY JEANES,
PLEASE?"

WERE it not that they have no immediate connection with my story, I should like to describe some of the curious and amusing experiences which befell me while I was acting as assistant to a barber and betting-agent. But in a narrative like this it is perhaps best that I should confine myself to the incidents and adventures which have direct bearing upon my search for Henry Jeanes, *alias* James Mullen, *alias* Captain Shannon.

I did not think it likely that the Professor would betray me to his clients. To do so would necessitate admitting that he had been bribed to allow a spy, if not a detective, to have access to the correspondence of the establishment. At the same time I did not think it advisable to take him into my confidence by telling him the object I had in view. Hence I had to pursue my investigations indirectly, and without appearing to be more curious about one of his customers than

about another. A casual question I had put concerning Jeanes elicited the information that the party in question was young and good-looking, and that the Professor did not suppose the correspondence which was being carried on meant anything more serious than a foolish love affair.

Several days went by, and the letter for Jeanes still remained uncalled-for. One morning the Professor asked me, as had happened on previous occasions, if I would keep an eye to the shop, while he ran over the way to get half a pint. I nodded assent, and, promising that he would not be long, he disappeared down the stairs, only to return for his pipe, which was lying on the mantelshelf. As he passed the rack, he took down the letters and ran through them, as if to see how many there were, and then giving me a look, which I interpreted as meaning that it would be no use to tamper with them in his absence, he again descended the stairs in search of liquid refreshment.

He had been gone about a quarter of an hour, when a man, muffled up to the nose, and wearing a soft hat, which was pulled down so closely over his brows that little more than a pair of blue spectacles was visible, opened the door, and stood coughing and panting, like a consumptive, on the mat outside. As he

showed no disposition to enter, I inquired what he wanted. Shaking his head, to indicate that he was unable to answer, he remained there, with stooped head and bent shoulders, hacking and coughing, for half a minute, and then in a hollow voice, which seemed strangely familiar, he asked if there were a letter for Mr. Henry Jeanes.

As calmly as if his coming were a matter of complete indifference to me, I took down the packet of letters, to select that which was addressed to Jeanes. To my dismay, I found it gone, but, repressing the exclamation of surprise that rose to my lips, I turned to the waiting messenger, and shook my head.

He mumbled something which sounded like "thank you," and then, closing the door, toiled painfully downstairs.

Scarcely had he reached the first landing before I had made what is called, in music-hall parlance, a "lightning change."

Tearing off my canvas coat and white apron, and tossing them in a heap upon a chair, I shot into, rather than got into, my reefer jacket, and, snatching at my hat, was down the stairs and out in the street before my visitor was half-way to the first corner, which led to an unfrequented side street. The instant he had turned it, I was after him like the wind, and, looking warily round, saw him

making for a narrow lane, that ran at right angles to the direction in which he was going. No sooner was he hidden by the corner than I was after him once again, but not so hurriedly as to forget to stop and peer round cautiously before exposing my own person to view.

The sight which met my eyes put me, I must confess, fairly out of countenance, for there—just round the corner—with the crush hat pushed to the back of his head, the muffler thrown open, and the blue spectacles in the hand which he pointed derisively at me, was none other than the Professor, literally rolling about with uncontrollable laughter.

“Oh, my poor korf! it is so bad I ain’t able to speak!” he gasped between his convulsions of merriment. “Ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, you ‘ap’porth o’ pigeon’s milk, wot thought you could get up early enough in the mornin’ to take a rise out of old Tom Lawrance! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, you feedin’-bottle fool and mug, as thought you’d got the bulge on Downy Tom! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Come and laugh at him, sonnies, come and laugh at him, for the biggest fool and mammy’s-milk Juggins and Johnny in all Stanby!”

CHAPTER XX

HOW JAMES MULLEN AND MYSELF ALMOST MET

THE Professor was in such high spirits at the success of his ruse that, when we returned together to the Haircutting Establishment, he was almost inclined to be genial, especially as I took the joke in good part and frankly admitted that I had never been so "let through" before. So friendly was he, in fact, that he readily agreed to my proposal to go over the way and bring back a bottle of something with which to ease his cough. After I had pledged "Downy Tom," and had expressed the intention of getting up a little earlier in the morning when next I intended stealing a march upon him, and when "Downy Tom" had pledged me in what—in delicate allusion to recent events—he humorously termed "pigeon's milk," but which was in reality the best "Unsweetened," we fell to discussing events almost confidentially.

"So it *is* Jeanes as you're after—as I always suspected, though you never arsked questions about him direct, but only as if by accident

and among the others," he said as he lit his pipe. "It 'ud 'ave saved a lot of trouble if you'd told me so at first."

"What do you mean by 'saved trouble'?" I asked.

"Why, if I'd known it was Jeanes you wanted I'd 'ave 'elped you—for a consideration, of course. I only took you into the shop because I meant to find out who you *was* after. Jeanes ain't nothink to me; but there is some of my pals as I wouldn't have no 'arm come to, not for a pot o' money. And I knew if I 'ad you there I could find out who it was you wanted, and give 'im the tip if it was a pal. Why, I've been a-playin' with you all this time—a-playin' off first one name and then another to see if it was your bloke. Then when I began to suspect it *was* Jeanes, I planned the little game I played to-day—an' *didn't* you tumble prettily! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" and off he went again into boisterous merriment at my expense.

It suited my purpose to humour him, so I joined good-humouredly in the laugh against myself; but, as a matter of fact, I had not been quite such a "pigeon" as the Professor supposed. Up to a certain point, the scoring had been in my favour, not in his, for I had succeeded, not only in intercepting an important letter which had been sent to his care, but

also in returning that letter—after I had made myself acquainted with its contents—to the place whence I took it, in order that it might reach the person to whom it was addressed.

But I knew very well that, should the Professor's suspicions once be aroused—as must have been the case when he detected me in the act of examining the letters—I should not only never again be allowed to go within reach of the rack where he kept them, but should, in all probability, be refused admission to his shop. Hence I had no choice but to adopt the somewhat daring course of openly offering him a bribe to take me into his service. If he were Mullen's confederate, he would already have had cause to suspect that I had designs upon the fugitive's liberty, but if, on the other hand, Mullen and the Professor had no other connection than that the former was having letters addressed to the latter's shop, it was quite within the bounds of possibility that the worthy Professor would, for a consideration, be prepared to tell me all he knew about the customer in question.

When the Professor had finished his laugh, I asked him quietly if he knew that the letter for Jeanes was gone.

"Do I know it's gone, you bally fool?" he said. "Why, of course I do. Wasn't it me came and called for it just now, when I had

such a bad korf; and didn't you say there wasn't any letter?"

"Yes, yes," I said, looking rather foolish; "of course I know that you came and asked for a letter, and that I told you there wasn't one, but I didn't know that you knew the letter really was gone."

"Well, considerin' that it was me took it, when I came back to get my pipe, I ought to know," he answered. Then, with a sudden change of manner, he said, "Look 'ere, Watson, or whatever your name is. I think us two can do a deal together. You want to get 'old of 'Enery Jeanes, don't you?"

I nodded.

"Supposin' I knew where 'e was to be found at this very minute, wot 'ud you give me for the information?"

"Ten pounds," I answered.

He snorted.

"Can't be done under twenty, ready money. Give us your twenty and I'm your man."

"No," I said. "Take me to where Jeanes is to be found, wherever it is, and I'll give you, not twenty, but fifty pounds, as soon as I'm sure it is the right man. I swear it, so help me God! and I won't go back on my word."

His eyes sparkled.

"You're a gentleman, I b'lieve," he said, "and I'll trust you. But you must keep my name

out of it. Now listen. When I went down the stairs to get that 'arf-pint I met Jeanes a-comin' up for 'is letters. I guessed it was 'im you was after, and I wasn't going to 'ave no arrests nor rows in my shop. Besides, if you wanted 'im bad, I guessed you'd be willin' to drop money on it, and if there was money to be dropped, I didn't see why I shouldn't be the one to pick it up."

Here was news, indeed! If the Professor were to be believed—and, notwithstanding my recent experience, I failed to see what motive he could have for misleading me in this instance—the man I wanted had been in the town, and in that very house, scarcely more than two hours ago! And I had been sitting there idly, when every moment—every second—was precious!

"Go on! go on!" I said excitedly. "Tell me the rest as fast as you can. There's not a moment to spare. I'll see you don't lose by it."

He nodded, and continued, but in the same leisurely way.

"Well, I arsked Jeanes to wait while I fetched the letter. That's wot I came back to get my pipe for. You remember I took the letters down and pretended to count 'em? Well, I sneaked it then and gave it 'im. He gave me a sovereign, and said there wouldn't be any more letters comin' for 'im, and 'e shouldn't be

calling at the shop no more. Then 'e arsked me wot time the next train left for London, and I told 'im in a quarter of an hour, and 'e said that wouldn't do, as 'e 'adn't 'ad no lunch and was starvin' 'ungry. So I told 'im there wasn't another for two hours and a 'arf, and 'e said that would do capital, and where was the best place to get some lunch. I told 'im the Railway Hotel, and 'e went there, 'cos I followed 'im to make sure. Then I whipped back, and played that little game on you, just to make sure it *was* Jeanes you wanted. And now I guess that fifty pounds is as good as mine. Jeanes 'll be at the hotel now, or, if 'e's left there, we can make sure of 'im at the station when 'e catches the London express. Wot d'you want 'im for? Looks a 'armless kind of bloke, and very pleasant-spoken."

"What's he like?" I said.

"Youngish, fair, and big eyes like a gal's. Wore a blue serge suit and a white straw 'at."

"Clean-shaven?" I asked.

"Yes, clean-shaved; or, any'ow, 'e'd no 'air on 'is face."

"That's the man," I said. "Well, come along, we'll be off to the hotel. Do you know any one there?"

"I knows the chief waiter. 'E often 'as five bob on a 'orse with me."

"All right. Then you'd better go in first,

and see your friend the waiter, and find out from him where Jeanes is. If our man heard anybody asking for him, by name, he might think something was wrong, and make a bolt. Then you'd lose your fifty pounds—which would be a pity."

The Professor assented, and we started for the Railway Hotel, he walking in front, as if without any connection with me, and I some twenty paces behind. When the swing doors closed upon him, I stopped, and pretended to look into a shop window until he should rejoin me.

I had been nervous and excited when we set out, but now that the crisis had come, and I was so soon to stand face to face with Henry Jeanes, *alias* James Cross, *alias* James Mullen, *alias* Captain Shannon, I was as cool and collected as ever I was in my life.

The next moment the Professor came hurrying out, with dismay plainly written on his face.

"'E's been there right enough," he said, all in a burst, and with a horrible oath, his features working meanwhile with agitation, the genuineness of which there was no mistaking. "But instead of 'aving lunch, as 'e told me 'e should, the —— 'ad a glass of sherry, and caught the 12.15 express to London, and 'e's more than got there by now, rot 'im!"

means of which I hoped eventually to "mate" him. What that move was the reader, who remembers the contents of the intercepted letters, will readily surmise.

In one of those letters, the fugitive to whom it was addressed was told that the steam yacht, by means of which he was to get out of the country, would be "lying just off the boat-builder's yard where the little yacht was laid up." A person who did not know who was the sender of the letter, or under what circumstances it was written, would be none the wiser for this piece of information. But to one who knew, as I did, that the writer was the wife of Mr. Stanley Burgoyne, it would not be difficult to ascertain the name of that gentleman's yacht, and the vessel's whereabouts.

Turning to the letter B in the list of owners in the current *Yachting Register*, I found that Mr. Stanley Scott Burgoyne's club was the Royal London, and that he had two boats—one a big steam yacht, called *Fiona*, the other a little five-tonner, named *The Odd Trick*. It was no doubt on board the former that Mullen was to get out of the country, and it was probably to the latter that Mrs. Burgoyne had referred in her letter.

No one can be led to talk "shop" more readily than your enthusiastic yachtsman, and by means of a visit, in the company of a

member, to the Club House of the Royal London in Savile Row, I ascertained that Mr. Burgoyne's little cruiser was laid up at Gravesend, in charge of a man named Gunnell.

Him I accordingly visited, under the pretext of wanting to buy a yacht. After some conversation I remarked casually,—

"By the bye, I think you have my friend Mr. Stanley Burgoyne's five-tonner, *The Odd Trick*, laid up here, haven't you?"

"I did have, sir," was the reply, "but Mr. Burgoyne, he telegraphed that I was to let his brother-in-law, Mr. Cross, have the boat out. That there's the telegram wot you see slipped in behind the olm'nack."

For the second time in the course of this curious enterprise the information I needed seemed to come in search of me, instead of my having to go in search of it. I little thought when I started out to interview the waterman Gunnell that I should strike the trail red hot, and so soon, for "Cross," as the reader may remember, was the name by which Mullen had previously passed, and by which he was known to his family—Mullen having been used only in connection with the conspiracy.

Lest the man should see by my face how important was the information he had let drop, I stooped, as if to flick a splash of mud from my trouser-leg before replying.

"Ah, yes," I said, straightening myself, and bending forward indolently to look at the telegram, which I read aloud.

"To Gunnell, Gravesend.—Get *The Odd Trick* ready and afloat. Mr. Cross will come for her.—BURGOYNE.

"Windsor Hotel, Scarborough."

"Of course," I went on aloud, "I had quite forgotten Mr. Cross's telling me, when I saw him last, that he was going to ask his brother-in-law to lend him *The Odd Trick* for a cruise. Whom has he got on board?"

"No one, sir. Mr. Cross was sailing her himself. Said he was only going as far as Sheerness, where he expected a friend, who would help him to handle her, to join him."

"He's a good sailor, isn't he?"

"No, sir, that's just what he isn't, and that's why I wanted him to let me go with him, until his friend turned up. But bless you, sir, he got that huffy there wasn't no holdin' him. And him a very pleasant-mannered gentleman in the usual way, and free with his money, too."

Our conversation was interrupted, at this point, by the entrance of another waterman with the key of the shed where the boat for which I was supposed to be negotiating was laid up. The craft in question was a pretty

little cutter, named *Pastime*. Her I made a great pretence of inspecting narrowly, and was careful to put the usual questions about draught, breadth of beam, and fittings, which would be expected from an intending purchaser.

"Isn't she rather like *The Odd Trick*?" I said casually, being desirous of getting a description of that vessel, without appearing to be unduly inquisitive.

"Lor' bless you, no, sir!" answered the honest Gunnell. "She's about the same *size* right enough, but *Pastime* is cutter-rigged and *The Odd Trick's* a yawl. Besides, *Pastime* is painted chocolate, and *The Odd Trick* is white, with a gold streak."

This was just the information I required, so after telling Gunnell that I would let him know my decision when I had seen another boat which was in the market, I slipped half a sovereign into his hand, as "conscience money," for taking up his time when I had no intention of becoming a purchaser, and bade him "Good-day, and thank you."

The result of my inquiries, though by no means unsatisfactory, had, I must confess, put me somewhat out of my reckoning. As the reader is aware, I had all along been of opinion that Mullen's hiding-place was on water, but I never imagined he would be so rash as to trust himself on a vessel which—

if his connection with the Burgoynes should reach the ears of the police—would be almost the first object of their investigations. I could only account for his doing so by supposing him to be convinced that the secret of his relationship—being known only to Mr. and Mrs. Burgoyne and himself—could not by any means come to light, and that, taking one thing with another, he considered it safer to make use of Burgoyne's boat than to cause inquiries to be made about himself by purchasing or hiring a boat from a stranger. Or it might be, that, as no fresh outrages had occurred for some time, the vigilance of the police had become partly relaxed, and that Mullen—knowing it to be so, and that the hue and cry had subsided—felt that his own precautions might be proportionately lessened.

Perhaps, too, the ease with which he had hitherto eluded pursuit had tended to make him careless, over-confident, and inclined to underrate the abilities of English detectives. But, whatever his reason, the fact remained that if Gunnell's story were to be believed—and I saw no cause to doubt it—Mullen had contrived to get possession of *The Odd Trick* by means of a telegram which, though purporting to come from Mr. Burgoyne, the owner of the boat, had in reality been despatched by Mullen himself.

That he was the sender of the telegram was evident from some inquiries which I afterwards made at Scarborough.

But, independently of these inquiries, I was satisfied that the telegram had been sent by Mullen, or at his instigation, and not by Mr. Burgoyne, as I knew by the date of the letter which Mrs. Burgoyne had sent to Mullen—the letter which I had intercepted—that her husband was in Bergen upon the very day on which the telegram from Scarborough had been despatched.

Clearly my next business must be to find the whereabouts of *The Odd Trick*, but before setting out to do so I had a point of some importance to consider.

Every one who has studied criminal psychology knows that each criminal has certain methods which are repeated in consecutive crimes. The circumstances may so vary as to cause the features of the crime to wear a different aspect from the features of any previous crime, but the methods pursued are generally the same.

The criminal classes are almost invariably creatures of habit. The fact that a certain method—be it adopted for the purpose of committing a crime, concealing a crime, or of effecting a criminal's escape—has proved successful in the past is to them the strongest

possible reason for adopting the same method in any fresh piece of rascality in which they may engage. They associate that method in their thoughts with what they call their "luck," and shrink from having to depart from it.

Hence the detective-psychologist should be quick to get what I may—with no sinister meaning in regard to after-events—be allowed to call the "hang" of the criminal's mind, and to discover the methods which, though varying circumstances may necessitate their being worked out in varying ways, are common to most of his crimes. The detective who can do this has his antagonist at a disadvantage. He is like the hunter who knows that the hare will double, or that this or that quarry will try to set the hounds at fault and seek to destroy the scent by taking to water. And just as the hunter's acquaintance with the tricks of the quarry assists him to anticipate and to forestall the poor beast's efforts to escape, so the detective who has taken a criminal's measure, and discovered the methods upon which the scoundrel works, can often turn the very means which are intended to effect an escape into means to effect a capture.

I need scarcely point out to the observant reader that Mullen's one anxiety, in all his movements, was, so to speak, to efface his foot-marks. He could be daring, and even reckless

at times, as witness this fact of his trusting himself on board a boat, which—should his connection with Mrs. Burgoyne leak out—would, as I have already said, be among the first objects to which the police would turn their attention. It seemed, in fact, as if, so long as he had satisfied himself that he had left no “spoor” behind, he preferred adopting a bold to a timid course. Carefulness in effacing his footmarks was indeed the key-word to his criminal code, and perhaps was the secret of the success with which he had hitherto carried out his designs. Given any fresh move on his part, and some cunning scheme for obliterating the trail might as surely and inevitably be looked for as night may be looked for after day.

I had—more by luck than by subtlety—traced Mullen to the boatyard at Gravesend, but there I lost sight of him completely. He had gone down the river, I was told, but what had become of him and of *The Odd Trick* there was not the slightest evidence to show. To go down the river in search of him seemed the natural and only course, but by this time I was beginning to understand my adversary's methods, and I felt that before asking myself, “Where has Mullen gone?” I should seriously consider the question, “What method has he adopted for putting a possible pursuer off the scent?”

CHAPTER XXII

THE ARTFULNESS OF JAMES MULLEN

“WHAT method has Mullen adopted for putting a possible pursuer off the scent?” I asked myself, and, as I did so, a passage from the letter which had been sent to him by Mrs. Burgoyne—the letter which I had fortunately intercepted—flashed into my mind.

“We do not see any necessity,” she had written, “for doing as you suggest in regard to sending the present crew back to England, under the pretence that we are not likely to be using the yacht for some time; and then, after getting the ship's appearance altered by repainting, and rechristening her the name you mention, engaging another crew of Norwegians.”

If Mullen had considered it necessary to take the precaution of changing the outward appearance of the steam yacht, he would probably consider it equally necessary to his safety that a similar course should be adopted in regard to *The Odd Trick*. That little craft

had been described to me by Gunnell as a five-ton yawl, painted white, with a gold streak. She had by now, no doubt, been entirely metamorphosed, and before I set out to find her, it was of vital importance that I should know something of the appearance of the boat for which I was to look. According to Gunnell, Mullen had gone down the river when he left Gravesend that evening, and indeed it was in the highest degree unlikely that he had gone up the river towards London in a small sailing vessel. Every mile traversed in that direction would render his movements more cramped, and more likely to come under observation, whereas down the river meant the open sea, with access to the entire sea-board of the country and, if necessary, of the Continent.

But should the authorities by any chance discover Mullen's connection with the Burgoynes, and learn, in the course of their subsequent inquiries, that he had gone down the river in a five-ton yawl, painted white and gold, they would probably go down the river in search of a boat answering to that description. Mullen was not the man to omit this view of the case from his calculations, and knowing what I did of his methods, I felt absolutely sure that he had adopted some plan by which he hoped, as usual, to set possible pursuers upon the wrong tack.

I had played my cards sometimes wisely, but more often foolishly, while conducting my search for Captain Shannon. But the wisest and the luckiest deal I made throughout the business was the determination that—before setting out to look for a five-ton yawl, painted white, with a gold streak, and bearing the name of *The Odd Trick*—I would spare no pains to ascertain what steps the fugitive had taken to put pursuers at fault.

But for that determination, and the discoveries to which it led, the little black cutter that I saw lying at anchor to the west of Southend when I steamed by the place in the small launch which I had hired for the purpose of carrying on my investigations would probably have been passed unnoticed. In that case, Captain Shannon would in all probability have reached America or Australia in safety, and this narrative would never have been written.

To the comment, "And small loss too!" which may rise to the lips of some of my readers, I can only reply that I undertook my search for Captain Shannon to please myself, and in search of excitement. It is not a literary study, but the plain story of the adventures which befell me, that is here set forth. Nor is it a story dealing with that sickliest of all subjects—the New Woman. On the contrary, it tells of one of the few pieces

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of mischief that have happened in this world, since the days of Eve, concerning which it may, without fear of contradiction, be affirmed that no woman had a hand in it. With the exception of the mere mention of Mrs. Stanley Burgoyne—who never once comes upon the scene in person—this is a story without a woman in it.

had I not all along believed that Cross's story about his picking up, at Sheerness, a friend who was to help him in handling the boat was a fabrication. I thought it much more likely that as soon as Cross was out of Gunnell's sight he had run into shore again and secured the services of one of the many watermen who are always on the look-out for a job.

Anyhow, the circumstances in connection with the black cutter were sufficiently suspicious to warrant me in making sure that she was not the boat I was in search of; and I decided that a watch must be kept upon her, not only by day, but by night. If Mullen were on board, and had any intention of changing his quarters, the probability was that the flitting would be effected by night. I was ready to go bail for the cutter's good conduct by day, but if an eye had to be kept upon her by night, it was necessary that I should have some one to share my watch. I knew nothing personally of the two men who constituted my crew, and was not inclined to take them into my confidence, so I sent a letter to Grant, who was still on guard at Canvey, asking him to come to Southend by the first train next morning, and to meet me at the pier-head, where I would join him in the dinghy.

He turned up to time, and the two of us sat down where we could not be seen by any one

on board the cutter that we might exchange experiences. Grant's story was soon told, for no "Mrs. Hughes" had reappeared to break the monotony of existence at Canvey, nor had anything which concerned the enterprise in which we were engaged occurred on the island. Then I told my yarn, after hearing which and the suspicions I entertained about the cutter, Grant agreed with me that an eye should be kept upon the vessel in question by night as well as by day.

"I'll tell you what I think will be a good plan," he said. "I know a man who has a little boat down here which he isn't sailing, and I'm sure I can arrange to get the loan of her for a week or two. Suppose I anchor her about as far away on the other side of the black cutter as your steam launch is anchored on this side. Then I can keep an eye upon the cutter at night, and if by any chance she tried to give us the slip, and made, as I expect she would, for the open sea, she'd have to run almost into your arms to do it. In that case I should follow her, and, as I went by, hail you to give chase, when you could soon overtake her. If, on the other hand, she goes up the river, it'll be as easy as driving a cow into a barn, for, once in, she'll have us behind her like a cork in the neck of a bottle; and even if she gets a bit of a start at first,

a sailing-boat would stand no chance in a race against steam. What do you think of it?"

I replied that I thought the idea capital, and after we had arranged a means of communicating with each other, I got into the dinghy and paddled back to the steam launch, while Grant set off for Southend, to put his plan into effect.

Next morning, as I was cooking a haddock for breakfast, one of my men put his head into the little cabin.

"Are you expecting any one from Southend, sir?" he said. "There's a man coming out in a skiff, and I think he's making for us. Seems in a hurry too."

I stepped outside, and looked in the direction indicated. A rowing boat, coming along at a great pace, was apparently heading directly for our steam launch. As soon as the skiff was within earshot, its occupant looked over his shoulder, relinquished a scull, and, arching his hand to windward over his mouth, hailed us lustily.

"Ahoy there! Are you *Maybelle*?"

"*Maybelle* it is," I bellowed, and, once more bending to his task, the fellow was alongside us in half a minute.

"Mr. Max Rissler?" he inquired.

"Yes, my man, I'm Mr. Rissler. What is it?" I asked.

"A letter, sir. I was to be as quick as I could about it," he answered, handing me, with his right hand, a note which he had taken from the lining of his cap, and smearing his forehead with the back of his left hand, as if to hint that if damp outside, he was dry enough within.

"Give him some beer," I said to my skipper as I opened the note.

It was in Grant's writing, and ran as follows:—

"Come as fast as you can to Going's Oyster Bar, in the High Street, exactly opposite the Royal Hotel. Come ready to go to town, if necessary. If I'm gone when you get to Going's, wait there till you receive wire from me.

"F. G."

As luck would have it, I was already dressed in a blue serge suit, which, if somewhat shabby, would be inconspicuous anywhere. My first intention was to change my yachting shoes—which had tan uppers with gutta-percha soles—for black boots, but it occurred to me that the noiseless soles would be extremely convenient for shadowing, should any necessity for doing so arise, and as the tan uppers made them look like ordinary brown shoes, I decided to go as I was.

"Can you wait here, while one of my men

and I row ashore?" I said to the messenger, tossing my yachting cap into an open locker, and donning the customary hard felt. "He'll be fresher than you are, and I don't want to lose a moment."

"Yes, sir; I'm in no hurry," the man replied.

"All right. Here's something for yourself. Jump in, Brown. You take one oar, and I'll take the other. Make for the beach, just below the Royal Hotel. The tide is running in fast, and I shall get there quicker by boat than if you landed me at the pier and I walked. Put your back into it, and we ought to be ashore well inside a quarter of an hour."

Brown bent to with such will that, by means of our united efforts, I was at Going's Oyster Bar within twenty minutes of receiving the message. Grant was sitting where he had a full view of the Royal Hotel opposite, but could not himself be seen from outside. He was watching the hotel door, and, except for one quick glance at me when I entered, did not withdraw his eyes, but motioned to me with his hand to take the chair beside him. No one was in the shop, so, without further ado, he began his story, which he related with commendable brevity.

"I came ashore last evening to post a letter," he said. "Kept an eye on the cutter, all the

same, and, as it was a fine evening, strolled up and down the Esplanade before going back to turn in for the night. By-and-by, I saw a boat coming off from cutter. Two men in it, and making for shore. Waited to see where they were going to land, and then hid behind bathing machine to shadow 'em. One man got out—looked as if he had reddish hair and beard—and the other took dinghy back to cutter. Man with red beard went to station. It was past eleven, and there'd be no 'up' train, so I supposed he'd be going on to Shoebury by the last 'down' train just about due, and decided to go with him. 'Down' train came in, but he turned, as if he'd just come by it, and went to Royal Hotel. He couldn't know me, so I followed, bold as brass. Heard him ask for bed, and I did same. His room was opposite mine, and I saw him go in. I didn't go to bed all night, lest I should oversleep. Peeped out at six and saw his boots outside, so evidently he was still there. Dressed and came down—boots still outside. Wouldn't wait for breakfast—came out—slipped in here—sent note to you—had breakfast here—paid bill, but said would wait, as friend was to join me, and here I am. He hasn't come out yet. Wonder if there's any way out from hotel at back? Great Scott! there he is! Is that the fellow you want?"

I looked, and saw a red-haired, red-bearded man, carrying a brown bag in his hand, leave the hotel and turn in the direction of the station.

"Don't know," I said. "I can't say I recognise him; but there is something—I don't know what—about him that seems familiar. Anyhow, we'll shadow him. He is going to the station, I expect, to catch the 10.12 up. I'll hail that closed carriage passing by. You jump in, and drive to station. You must get there before him. Book to town, and get in fore part of train. I'll follow on behind him, and get in back part. Wait in the train at Fenchurch till he has passed your carriage, and join me as I go by."

Grant's reply was to jump into the cab with the words "London and Tilbury Railway, as fast as you can," and I soon had the satisfaction of seeing him whirled past the man with the red beard, and disappear round the corner which led to the station.

"The fellow may go by the other line—the Great Eastern," I said to myself as I followed at a respectful distance, "in which case I must do the same, and shan't see Grant at the other end, which is awkward, as we haven't arranged a meeting-place. But I hadn't time to think of everything, and, as the 10.12 will be starting directly, it looks as if he's going by it. Ah! he has turned the Tilbury line corner, so it's all right, after all."

I waited at the door a moment while the red-bearded man was taking his ticket. "Fenchurch—third single," he said briskly. "Fenchurch—third single," I repeated as soon as he had passed the barrier, and, hurrying after him, was just in time to see him enter a third-class smoking carriage in the centre of the train. I slipped quietly into a carriage in the rear, and in another half-minute we were puffing out of Southend.

Although the man I was shadowing had booked to Fenchurch Street, I thought it wise, at every stoppage, to keep an eye upon the passengers who left the train; and so we journeyed on, making calls at Westcliff, Leigh, Benfleet, Pitsea, Laindon, East Horndon, Upminster and Hornchurch. At the last-named station, a burly farmer, with a body like a bullock, leant half out of the window of my carriage, to carry on a conversation with a friend upon the platform, and in doing so blocked my view completely.

"Will you allow me to get a paper, please?" I said, fuming with impatience, for, although the train was already moving, I had been unable to see whether any one had alighted.

"So I tould 'im I'd give 'im five pun ten," continued the yokel leisurely, but interpolating a surly "Yer can't get one 'ere," which he threw at me over his shoulder, without turn-

ing his head or attempting to withdraw from the window; "I tould 'im I'd give 'im five pun ten"—this to the friend, who was running along the platform beside the now quickly moving train—"and he sez, sez he, I'd rather give 'im to yer. Ha, ha, ha!"

In despair I thrust my head under his arm, just in time to see the man with the red beard and brown bag give up his ticket and disappear through the exit. I could not get out and follow him, for the yokel who had blocked my view drew in his great shoulders suddenly, and in so doing wedged me into the window like a plug in a cask. By the time I could extricate myself, the train had cleared the station, and was spanking along towards London.



"In despair I thrust my head under his arm."

Captain Shannon.]

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CHAPTER XXIV

A PRETTY KETTLE OF FISH!

HERE was a pretty kettle of fish! For the first desperate moment, wild thoughts of pulling the connecting-cord, and stopping the train, peeped in my brain, as mad faces peep from the windows of an asylum. But as the mad faces vanish at the return of the keeper, so, in the next moment, wiser counsels prevailed, and I settled down to consider the situation with the seriousness which the facts demanded.

And first, I had to ask myself what could be the red-bearded passenger's motive for booking to London, and then suddenly changing his plans, and getting out at an unimportant country station? Could it be that he was indeed James Mullen, and was at his old tricks of endeavouring to put pursuers at fault?

If he had reason to believe himself shadowed from Southend, he could have done nothing wiser than to alight at Hornchurch. A detective who suspected the traveller's identity, and

had watched him enter the train at one end, would in all probability telegraph to the police, instructing them to meet the train at the other end, and effect the suspect's arrest. By alighting at Hornchurch, Mullen would dodge any one who might be waiting for him at the terminus, and would, moreover, compel a detective who had followed him from Southend to come out into the open. It is easy enough to shadow a man in London, where the person so engaged is only one in a crowd, but in a country village the shadower could hardly hope to escape observation.

Altogether I had to admit that, even had I seen—while there was time for me to follow him—the red-bearded man get out at Hornchurch, I should have been uncertain how to act. Probably not more than two passengers would be likely to leave the train at such a place, and it would be comparatively easy for a man like Mullen to decide who had legitimate business in the neighbourhood, and who had not. To have alighted there would have brought me under his direct notice, and this—as it was quite possible that, in order to obtain evidence of his identity, circumstances might yet render it necessary for me to come in personal contact with him—I was anxious to avoid.

So far as I knew, he was at that time unaware of my connection with Green and

Quickly, whose action in constituting themselves private detectives he might reasonably suppose had been taken upon their own responsibility, and in the hope of enriching themselves by obtaining the offered reward.

Knowing as I did how long was Mullen's arm, and how merciless his vengeance, I could not help thinking that, had he been aware of my connection with the two men I have mentioned, and of my intentions towards himself, he would, before this, have made an attempt to bestow upon me some such unmistakable mark of his personal attention as he had bestowed upon them. No such attempt having been made argued—so at least I tried to persuade myself—that I had been lucky enough to escape his notice and the honour of being entered upon his black list. Had I got out at Hornchurch, and denounced the red-bearded man as Captain Shannon, when I had no shred of actual evidence in support of my statement, and when it was more than possible he might be some one else, I should not only have rendered myself ridiculous, but should actually have trumped my own card, by making known to the real Captain Shannon, as well as to the public generally, the enterprise upon which I was engaged.

All things considered, the incident by which I had been prevented from seeing the man I was

shadowing leave the train at Hornchurch until it was too late to follow him was not an unmixed evil. It was possible that had I been compelled to act upon the spur of the moment, I might have adopted a course which I should afterwards have regretted.

While I had been coming to this conclusion, the train had trundled along towards the next station, and was already slowing for a stoppage. If action were to be taken, there was no time to lose, and, for the moment, I found it difficult to decide whether it would be wiser to go on to London, or to get out, and make my way back to Hornchurch, that I might pursue inquiries about the red-bearded man and his movements.

If, as I suspected, he and James Mullen were one and the same person, the chances were that he had got out at Hornchurch, not because he had any business there, but to put a possible pursuer at fault. In that case, he would go on to London—which was in all probability his destination—by a later train, or it was possible that he might seek other means of reaching town than by the line on which he had set out.

And then, all in a moment, I recollected what I ought to have recollected at first—that Hornchurch is but half an hour's walk from Romford, where there is a station on the Great Eastern Railway.

Might it not be, I asked myself, that Mullen, knowing this, had got out at Hornchurch, in order that he might walk to Romford, and thence continue his journey to town by another line? Such a manoeuvre was just what one might expect from him, and I promptly decided to act upon the assumption that this was what he had done.

At Fenchurch Street I joined Grant, and told him, in a few hurried words, what had happened, and what were my suspicions.

"If Red-Beard has got upon the Great Eastern line at Romford," I said, "he can't go farther than Liverpool Street, the terminus. He may, of course, 'do' us, by getting out at some station immediately preceding the terminus. That, however, I must chance, and it's not at all unlikely he may come on by an express that doesn't stop at the intermediate stations. Anyhow, I'm going to cab it to Liverpool Street, to watch all the Romford trains. You stay here—where you can't be seen, of course—and keep an eye upon the other trains that come in. If you see Red-Beard, shadow him, and wire me to the club when you've got any news. But remember Quickly and Green, and for Heaven's sake take care of yourself. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXV

JAMES MULLEN AND I MEET AT LAST

AS the cab which I had chartered rattled up the approach to the Great Eastern terminus at Liverpool Street, I had to admit to myself that the probability of my falling in again with the red-bearded man scarcely justified my sanguine feelings.

I am not, in the general way, given to "presentiments," but, on this occasion, I felt almost childishly confident about the result of my stratagem. Though I told myself, over and over again, that there is nothing so hope-destroying to an active mind as compulsory inaction, and that it was only because I had something definite, with which to occupy myself, that I felt so hopeful—not all my philosophy could persuade me that I should fail in bringing the enterprise to a successful termination.

Curiously enough, presentiment was, for once, justified of her assurance, and at the expense of philosophy, for as the clocks were chiming eight, and evening was beginning to

close in, whom should I see step out upon the platform from a Romford train but my gentleman of the red beard and brown bag!

After his ticket had been collected, he walked out of the station into Liverpool Street, crossed the road, and went up New Broad Street, towards the Bank. Then he entered a tobacconist's shop, whence he emerged puffing a big cigar, and proceeded up Cheapside, until he reached Foster Lane, down which he turned. Here I had to be more cautious, for, as it was Saturday night, the side streets of the City were deserted. Even in the main thoroughfares—where, during the five preceding days, blows had rained thick and fast, with scarce a moment's interval, upon the ringing anvils of Traffic—a lull was perceptible, but in the side streets there was absolute silence.

When I saw the man with the red beard and brown bag turn down Foster Lane, which, as every Londoner knows, is at the back of the General Post Office, I felt that it was indeed a happy thought which had prevented me from changing my shoes that morning after receiving Grant's summons. Had I been wearing my ordinary "lace-ups" I should have been in a dilemma, for it is not easy to divest oneself of laced boots in a hurry, and in that deserted place the sound of footsteps upon the stones would easily have been detected.

But, for the purposes of shadowing, nothing could be better than the gutta-percha-soled shoes of which I have spoken; and by keeping well in the shadow, and flitting from doorway to doorway only at such times as I judged it safe to make a move, I hoped to keep an eye upon Red-Beard without attracting his notice.

The result justified my anticipations, for, when he reached the back of the General Post Office, he stopped, and looked hastily up and down the street, as if to make sure that he was unobserved. Not a soul was in sight, and I need scarcely say that I had made of myself a very wafer, and was clinging, like a postage stamp, to the door against which I had squared myself.

Satisfied, apparently, that the way was clear, he put down his bag, opened it, and lifted out something which, from the stiff movement of his arms, appeared to be heavy. This he placed so gingerly upon the ground that I distinctly heard him sigh as he drew his hands away. He stood erect, puffed fiercely at his cigar until it kindled and glowed like a live coal, took it from his lips, turned the lighted end round to look at it, and stooped, cigar in hand, over the thing that lay at his feet. I saw an answering spark shine out, flicker for a moment, and die away, and heard Red-Beard mutter "Damna-

tion! Hell!" through his teeth. The next instant, there was the spurt that told of the striking of a lucifer match. Then he stooped again over the object he had taken from the bag, and I saw a tiny point of light, which, as I stood looking on, half paralysed with horror, increased visibly in size and in brightness. That he had fired the fuse of an infernal machine I could not doubt, and, for one moment, my limbs absolutely refused to obey my bidding. I tried to call out, but gave utterance only to a silly, inarticulate noise that was more like a bleat than a cry, and was formed neither by my lips nor my tongue, but seemed to come from the back of my throat. Slight as it was, the sound reached the ears of the man with the bag, for he came to an erect posture in an instant, looked quickly to right and to left, and walked briskly away in the opposite direction.

And then the night stillness was broken by a terrible cry—a cry so unearthly that it made the blood in my veins run cold, although I knew that it was from my own lips, and no other, that the sound had come.

That cry broke the spell that bound me. Even while it was ringing in my ears, I leapt out, like a tiger athirst for blood, from the doorway in which I was hiding, and, heedless of the hissing fuse, which burnt faster and

brighter for the current of air that I set in motion as I rushed by it, I was after him, every drop of blood in my body boiling with fury, every muscle and tendon of my fingers twitching to grip the miscreant's throat.

Had he been as fleet of foot as a greyhound, he should not have escaped me; and though he had thrown away the bag, and was now running for dear life, I was upon him before he was half-way down Noble Street. When he heard me behind him, he stopped and faced round suddenly. As he did so, I struck him with my clenched fist, and with all my strength, full under the jaw. Shall I ever again feel such savage joy as thrilled me when his teeth snapped together like the snap of the teeth of an iron rat-trap, and the rush of his blood made warm my hand? He went down like a pole-axed ox, but, in the next second, had staggered to his knees, and thence to his feet. His hand was fumbling at a side-pocket, whence I saw the butt-end of a revolver protruding, but, before he could get at it, I had him by the throat, where my blow had knocked the false red beard awry, and I promise you that my grip was none of the gentlest. Nor for the matter of that was my language. I am, by habit, nice of speech, and not given to oaths, but words, which I have never used before, nor since, bubbled up in my throat,



"From the neighbourhood of the General Post Office came a sudden
blaze of light,"

Captain Shannon.]

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and would out, though a whole bench of listening bishops were by.

"You bloody monster!" I cried, and the words seemed to make iron of the muscles of my arm, and granite of every bone in my fist, as I struck him again and again in the face, with all my strength. "You hell-miscreant and devil! By God in heaven, I'll pound the damned life out of you!"

As the words escaped my lips, the solid ground seemed to stagger and sway beneath me, and, from the neighbourhood of the General Post Office, came a sudden blaze of light, by which I saw a tall chimney crook inwards at the middle, as a leg is bent at the knee, and then snap in two like a sugar-stick. There was a low rumble, and a roar like the discharge of artillery, that was followed by the strangest ripping, rending din, as of the sudden tearing asunder of innumerable sheets of metal. I was conscious of the falling of masonry, of a choking limy dust in my eyes, nostrils and throat, and then a red darkness closed in upon me with a crash, and I remember no more.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER THE EXPLOSION

WHEN I opened my eyes I found myself lying at night in my room at Buckingham Street. I made an effort to sit up in bed, but my head had suddenly become curiously heavy—so heavy that the effort to raise it was almost too much for me, and I was glad to fall back upon the pillow where I lay for a moment, feeling more faint and feeble than I had ever felt before. Then there glided into the room—into my bachelor room—a pleasant-looking young woman dressed in grey with white collar and cuffs.

"What's happened, nurse?" I said, recognising at once what she was—which was more than could be said of my voice, for it had become so thin and piping that its unfamiliarity startled me.

"Oh, nothing has happened of any consequence," she replied, smiling, "except that you have not been very well. But you're mending now, and another day or two will see you quite yourself again."

"What's been the matter with me?" I asked.

"You got a blow on the head by the fall of a chimney," she answered. "But I can't let you talk now. Mr. Grant is coming in to sleep here to-night, as I've promised to take a turn at sitting up with a patient who is very ill. You can ask Mr. Grant in the morning to tell you anything you wish to know, but now you must go to sleep."

That something had happened, notwithstanding her assurance to the contrary, I was certain; but what that something was, I did not know, nor did I very much care, for I felt dull and silly, and by no means disinclined to follow her advice.

When I awoke, it was broad daylight, and Grant, in his shirt-sleeves, was standing before the looking-glass, shaving. My head was much clearer, and I was able to recall what had taken place, up to the point when I had lost my senses after the explosion at the General Post Office.

"Have they got him, Grant?" I inquired.

He jumped like a "kicking" rifle.

"Good Lord! old man, how you startled me! You've made me slash myself horribly. Got whom?" he said.

"Mullen," I answered.

"Mullen? Oh, then you *do* know all about

it? No, they haven't. But how are you feeling?"

"Like a boiled owl. How long have I been ill?"

"Three weeks. You got knocked on the head by a chimney-pot or something, and had a touch of concussion of the brain."

"Was there much damage done?"

"Damage? I believe you. The top of Cheap-side pretty near blown away, and the General Post Office half wrecked."

"How did I get here?"

"In fine state, my boy—on a stretcher. They were taking you to the hospital when I came along—which I did as soon as I heard the noise of the explosion. I said I knew you, told them who you were, and had you brought here instead. And a bad time you've had of it, I can tell you. But now you mustn't talk any more."

"Oh, I'm all right! Tell me, were there many people killed?"

"A good many in the Post Office, but not many outside. You see, being Saturday, most of the places were empty except for caretakers. And now go to sleep."

"One more question only. Does any one know I was after Mullen when it happened?"

"No; they thought you were passing by chance. You see I told them who you were,

but I couldn't tell them what had happened, as I didn't know, and you couldn't speak for yourself, so I thought I'd better say nothing until you were well enough to tell your own story."

"And Mullen got clean away?"

"Look here, old man, this won't do, you know. The doctor said you weren't to be allowed to talk more than could be helped."

"Answer me that, then, and I'll ask no more for the present."

"Yes, the ruffian got clean away, and no one knows to this day how he did it. Do you?"

"Yes. I saw him do it."

"The deuce you did! But there, you shall tell me all about it to-morrow. Have a drop of beef-tea and then go to bye-bye."

To which, as I was feeling drowsy again, I consented.

My power of recuperation is great, and a few days saw me comparatively well in body, though by no means easy in mind. Up to this point, my search for Captain Shannon had seemed to me a somewhat public-spirited and deserving enterprise. To bring such a scoundrel to justice, would be rendering a service to the country and to the cause of humanity; and in the wild scene of excitement, which I knew would follow the news of his arrest, I liked to picture myself as receiving the thanks of the

community, and, in fact, being regarded as the hero of the hour.

But now that my enforced leisure gave me time to think things over more critically, the matter began to present itself in a different light. I was, indeed, by no means sure that—by withholding from the authorities the suspicions I entertained about the man with the red beard, and by taking upon myself the responsibility of keeping, unaided, an eye upon his movements,—I was not morally answerable for the lives which had been lost in the explosion at the Post Office.

It was quite possible that had I gone to the authorities *before* the event, and informed them of my unsupported suspicions, I should have been laughed at for my pains. But were I to come forward, *after* the event, and admit that before the outrage occurred, and while yet there was time to prevent it, I had suspected the man with the brown bag to be James Mullen, and yet had withheld my suspicions from the police, I might be looked upon as less of a fool than a scoundrel.

The motives which had caused me to keep silent would be open to the worst interpretation. I should everywhere be denounced as an enemy of society, whose contemptible vanity had made him think himself capable of coping, single-handed, with the greatest artist in crime of the

century, and whose yet more contemptible greed had led him—in order that he might secure the whole of the reward for himself—to withhold from the proper authorities the information by means of which the capture of the arch-murderer might have been effected, and the last dreadful outrage prevented.

Knowing, as I did, to what a pitch public feeling had risen in regard to the outrage, I could not disguise from myself that a man who made such a confession as I contemplated, would—should he be recognised in the streets—stand a very good chance of being mobbed, if not lynched.

An infuriated mob is not in the habit of making nice distinctions; and so long as a scapegoat, on which to wreak vengeance, has fallen into its hands, it does not wait to inquire too particularly into the question of the scapegoat's innocence or guilt.

Let the primary object of its wrath be not forthcoming, and let some foolish or wicked person raise the cry that this or that luckless passer-by is the offender's relative or friend—or even that he has been seen coming from the offender's house, or is of the same nationality—and, in nine cases out of ten, the mob will "go" for the luckless wight *en masse*.

I have made a study of that wild beast which we call "a mob"—the one wild beast

which Civilisation has given us in exchange for the many she has driven away—and, knowing something of the creature and of its habits, I must confess that I would rather fall into the clutches of the wild beast of the jungle, than into the clutches of the wilder beast of the city and the slum.

One day—one not very distant day—that wild beast will turn and rend its keepers, and when once the thing has tasted human blood, it will not be beaten back into its lair with the thirst for blood unglutted.

There are compensations to being mobbed or lynched in a noble cause, and in support of a great principle, but there is no glory in being subjected to physical violence, or to personal insult, as a scoundrel and a knave.

Worse, however, than the possibility of being mobbed, was the certainty of being held up, in many quarters, as an object for public odium and private scorn; and, the more I thought about the matter, the less inclined did I feel to face the consequences of confessing the part which I had played in the recent tragedy. It was upon my own responsibility, I argued, that I had entered upon the enterprise, and, so long as I kept within the law, it was to myself, only, that I was responsible for the way in which the enterprise was carried out. That I had failed, meant nothing more than that what had

happened to those, whose business and whose duty it was to succeed, had happened also to me; and after all, I left things no worse than they were when I took the matter up.

Had it been my intention to abandon my quest, I should have had no choice but to acquaint New Scotland Yard with what had come to my knowledge. This, however, was not the case, for I was more than ever set on bringing the miscreant, Captain Shannon, to justice—not merely for the sake of the reward, or because of the craving for adventure which had first urged me to the enterprise, but because of the loathing which I entertained for the monster whom I had, with my own eyes, seen at his hellish work. Hence I was justified, I argued, in keeping my information to myself, and the more so for the fact that, were I to say all I knew, the particulars would no doubt be made public, and in this way would reach the ear of Captain Shannon, thus defeating the very end for which I had made my confession.

Into the questions whether the decision, to which I came, was right or wrong, and whether the arguments with which I sought to square my decision with my conscience and my sense of duty, were founded on self-interest and inclination, rather than on reason, I will not here enter.

When that decision was once made, I gave

no further thought to the rights or wrongs of the matter, but concentrated all my energies upon the task of finding Captain Shannon.

And first, I decided to pay a visit to Southend, to see if the little black cutter were still there, and if not, to discover what had become of her.

As one walks down the High Street of that popular watering place, the pier lies directly in front, running out a mile and a quarter to sea on its myriad slender feet, like a gigantic centipede. To the left, with lips stooped to the water's edge, the Old Town straggles away seaward, a broken line of picturesque irregular buildings — some cheerful red, others warm yellow, and a few cool gray—reminding one, not a little, of some quaint French or Belgian port, blinking in the morning sunshine.

To the right are the shady shrubberies and wooded slopes of the West Cliff. Sunny little Southend-on-Salt-Water may be unable to show such a sea as one finds at big, boastful Brighton, but it is a green and homelike spot, and not mere brick and mortar by the briny. Here are no long lines of stuccoed mansions, and staring straight parades, but grass, sweet and springy, as on a Surrey common, and sloping flower-strewn heights that run down waterward, like a happy child that hastens with outstretched arms towards the sea.

And oh! such skies! such cloud-pomp and pageantry, and above all such sunrises and sunsets! Such dance and sparkle of moving water, when the tide is in; and, more beautiful still, when the tide is out, such play of light and shadow, such wonderful wealth of colour on the marshy flats—here a patch of royal purple or opalescent green, there a rose-grey or pearly-pink, with little shining pools that change from blue to silver, and from silver to blue, with the passing of every cloud.

Southend is at any time as pretty a place as is to be found within fifty miles of London, but after a month spent in town on a sick bed, and in a stuffy side-street, the view from the West Cliff seemed to me wonderfully beautiful.

As I stood there, drinking my fill of the sweet, strong, seaweed-scented air, and basking in the sunshine, I was conscious of being scrutinised, quietly but keenly, by a man who was lounging near the flagstaff.

There was nothing in his appearance or dress—white flannel trousers and shirt, cricketing blazer and straw hat—to distinguish him from the hundreds of holiday makers, in like attire, who are to be seen in and about Southend during the season, but I recognised him at once, and with some alarm, as one of the cleverest officers of the detective force, and one, more-

over, who had been specially told off to effect the capture of Mullen.

In detective stories, as in pantomimes — no doubt for the same reason — the policeman is, too often, held up to scorn and ridicule, as an incompetent bungler, who is more dangerous to the hearts of susceptible servant-girls than to law-breakers, and more given to deeds of prowess in connection with the contents of the pantry, than in protecting the lives or properties of Her Majesty's subjects. The hero of the detective story is very often a brilliant amateur, of whom the police are secretly jealous, notwithstanding the fact that, whenever they have a difficult case, they come, hat in hand, to seek his assistance. This, after a little light banter for the benefit of the Boswell who is to chronicle his marvellous doings — and in the course of which, by-the-bye, the fact that the police are about to arrest the wrong man is not unfrequently elicited — he condescends to give, the understanding between him and them being that he shall do the work and they take the credit.

Why the amateur detective should be the victim of a modesty, which is not always characteristic of the amateur in other professions, does not transpire, but the arrangement is extremely convenient to the policeman and to the author, the latter probably adopting it lest inquisitive readers should ask why, if there

are such brilliant amateur detectives as authors would have us to believe, we never hear of them in real life.

Now, I should be the last in the world to cheapen the work of my fellow craftsmen. I hold that there is no more unmistakable mark of a mean mind than is evinced in the desire to extol oneself at the expense of others. None the less I must enter my protest against what I cannot but consider an unwarrantable imputation upon a very deserving body of men.

Detectives and policemen, taken as a whole, are by no means the bunglers and boobies which in the pantomimes and in the pages of detective stories they are made out to be. I do not say that they are all born geniuses, for genius is no commoner among detectives than among cooks, clergymen, novelists, barristers, painters, or thieves. But what I do say is, that the rank and file of them are painstaking and intelligent men, who perform their duties conscientiously and efficiently. To dub them all "duffers," because, now and then, a detective is caught napping, is as unjust as to declare that all clergymen are fools, because a silly sermon is sometimes preached from a pulpit.

I had managed to get ahead of the police in the investigations I was conducting; but my success was due, not to the shining abilities with

which I am endowed, for, as the reader knows, I bungled matters sadly on more than one occasion, but to the fact that Fate had thrown a clue in my way at the start. But I have never underrated the acuteness and the astuteness of the Criminal Department of New Scotland Yard, and it did not greatly surprise me to find, when I commenced operations again at Southend, that though the little black cutter was still lying off the same spot, she was being closely watched by men, whom I knew to be detectives.

Whether they had discovered the relationship between Mullen and the owner of *The Odd Trick*, and, in following up the clue, had traced the boat to Southend; or whether they were in possession of information, unknown to me, which led them to believe that the fugitive had been hiding in the neighbourhood, I could not say. But that they were there to effect the capture of Mullen, should he return to the cutter, I had no doubt.

Mullen was too wary a bird, however, to come back to the nest before he had satisfied himself that no net had been spread there to catch him. That he had got wind of what was going on at Southend, seemed probable from the fact that he did not return to the cutter. And even had he done so, I could scarcely have hoped to profit thereby, for, in that case, it was not likely that I should be so fortunate as to forestall the police in the matter of his arrest.

Under the circumstances, to have stayed longer in Southend would have been mere waste of time. The question I had to ask myself before deciding on my next "move" was, "Where is he likely to be?"

As crime begets crime, so question begets question. "Where is he likely to be?" had scarce come to the birth before it was itself in travail with, "Why not on the *Cuban Queen*?"

CHAPTER XXVII

I PLAY A GAME OF BLUFF WITH HUGHES

“**W**HY not on the *Cuban Queen*, indeed?” I repeated, as I called to mind the fact that it was there Mullen had lain secure, when the hue and cry were at their height. It was only when the hue and cry had somewhat subsided, that he had ventured forth to commence his devilry afresh; and what was more likely—now that the hue and cry had been raised once more—than that he should creep back to his former hiding-place?

Next afternoon I was again in the little cottage at Canvey, and should have been there sooner but for the fact that I wished first to satisfy myself that my movements were not being watched by the police.

I did not intend, on this occasion, to waste time by endeavouring to ascertain whether any one except Hughes was on board the hulk—especially as I was now without Quickly’s assistance. This was a case in which it would be safer to achieve my purpose by a bold stroke, than to adopt the more cautious course

of beating about the bush. The way to go to work would be to engage Hughes in conversation, and when he was off his guard to charge him with giving shelter to a fugitive from justice. The cleverest rogue is apt to betray himself when a surprise is thus sprung upon him, and such a clumsy rascal as Hughes should not be difficult to deal with. I did not doubt that he would deny the impeachment with much bluster and more bad language, but by keeping a keen eye upon his face when playing my game of bluff, I hoped to see there something which would assist me in coming to a definite conclusion in regard to Mullen's whereabouts.

But I had yet to catch the hare which I felt so competent to cook, and, of the two tasks, the former promised to be the more difficult. Hughes, as the reader already knows, seldom left the hulk, and as it was quite out of the question that I should seek him there, some plan which would make it necessary for him to come ashore had to be devised.

After much brain-cudgelling, I hit upon an idea which I immediately proceeded to carry out. Nothing but oil was used for lighting and cooking purposes in the cabin of the *Cuban Queen*, and Thursday was the day upon which fresh supplies were taken to the hulk by the attendant whose duty it was to fetch and carry for Hughes and the other caretakers. The man in question

had to pass my door on his way to the boat, and I had seen the tin can in his hand repeatedly. At the very moment of which I am writing I was reminded of his weekly errand, for the day was Thursday, and he was even then going by my gate, carrying the oil-can in one hand and a small sack of potatoes in the other. Here was an opportunity which were I to neglect it I should have to wait seven days before taking action. Without further ado, I opened the door and hailed him.

"I want you to do a little commission for me," I said. "You'll be going down to the village some time to-day, I know. Could you leave a letter to Mr. Hayes at the vicarage?"

"Yes, sir," he replied civilly; "with pleasure."

"That's right. Put your sack and the can down, and come into the other room while I scribble the letter. I daresay I can find you a glass of grog and a cut of cold beef in there, if you feel like having a mouthful."

"Thank you, sir," he said, unburdening himself of his load, and following me into the inner room. I had only just finished my own breakfast, and a small joint was still on the table.

"Pull up and help yourself," I said, producing a knife and a fork. "What'll you have to drink? I've got some old rum. How'll that suit you?"



"Half a tumbler of soda-water hissed into the can."

Captain Shannon.]

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"Capital, sir," he replied.

"All right. It's in the other room, I think. I'll be back in a moment. You make a start meanwhile on the cold beef."

No sooner was I in the other room, with the closed door between us, than I whipped out the cork from the paraffin can, and, seizing a syphon of soda-water that stood upon the table—it was the only liquid handy—I slipped the spout into the mouth of the can, and pressed the tap.

"If this isn't pouring oil on the troubled waters, it's, at least, pouring troubled waters on the oil," I said to myself, when half a tumbler of soda-water had hissed into the can. "There'll be some rosy language about when Hughes goes to light his lamp after filling it up with this stuff. He'll never get it to light, much less to burn. And if he doesn't make the discovery too early, the man who looks after his requirements will be gone, and Master Hughes will have to sit in the dark, and go to bed with his supper uncooked, or else come into Canvey to get some more oil. He may, of course, fill up his cooking stove in the daytime, and find the oil won't burn, or he may have enough oil left in it to carry him through. But anyhow, if the affair doesn't work out as I hope, there will be no harm done, for, at the worst, he can only suppose that some water has accidentally got into the can."

The affair *did* work out as I had hoped,

however, for, as night was closing in, I saw Hughes unleash the dinghy to come ashore. Judging by the sounds which broke the evening stillness, I had reason to believe that he was at his old habit of swearing aloud and to himself. It is a habit which is more soothing to the swearer than to an enforced listener, especially when the swearer is rowing a heavy boat against the tide, and jerks out a fresh, and aggressively-emphasised oath, with each expulsion of breath. On this occasion the hopes which were expressed about the soul, eyes, limbs, and internal organs of every one who had been connected with the offending oil—beginning with the person who “struck” it, and finishing off with the shop-keeper who sold it, and the man who brought it to the hulks—were distinctly uncharitable.

Nor did Hughes confine himself to human beings, for the can in which the oil had been carried, as well as the various matches which he had used, in his unavailing efforts to light the lamp, were, with strict impartiality, similarly banned.

“Oil!” he growled as he ran the boat ashore. “I’ll oil ’im, and the —— man wot sold it, too!” (More hopes in regard to the soul, eyes, limbs, and internal organs of the offender.) “A —— fine fool ’e made o’ me, standin’ there burnin’ my fingers, and a box o’ matches, tryin’ to find out

what was wrong. Oil! Call that — splutterin' stuff oil! Why, I might as well 'ave tried to set fire to the — river."

Still swearing, he made fast the dinghy, and proceeded, can in hand, in the direction of the village.

After a time, I started to follow, and overtook him just as he was passing my cottage.

"Good-night," I called out over my shoulder in passing, as is the custom in the country.

He replied by bidding me go to a place which, though it may, likely enough, have been his ultimate destination, I sincerely hope may never be mine, nor the reader's.

"I'm sure I know that dulcet voice," I said, stopping, and wheeling round. "It must be, it *is*, the genial Hughes. How are you, my worthy fellow?"

The worthy fellow intimated that his health was not noticeably affected for the better by the sight of me.

"Oh, don't say that," I said. "You were most hospitable to me in the matter of drinks, when I had the pleasure of spending a very delightful hour in your company, on board the *Cuban Queen* one evening. Pray let me return the compliment. This is my cottage, and I've got some excellent whisky aboard. Won't you come in and have a glass?"

This was a temptation not to be resisted.

"Very well. I'll give you the money, to-night, to square him, and some on account for yourself, as well. And now another question. Where does your wife live?"

"Mill Lane, Chelmsford."

"That's all right. When you get back to the *Cuban Queen*, you'll get a telegram from Chelmsford, to say she's dying, and that you must go to her. You must show this telegram to the man you've got on board. What did he say his name was, by the bye?"

"Winton."

"Well, you must show the telegram to Winton, and tell him you intend applying for leave, and that he must go somewhere else in the meantime. He won't want to leave the only safe hiding-place he's got, and he'll try to persuade you not to go, and will perhaps offer you a big money bribe to stay. You must persist in going; but, after a time, you must say that you have a brother at Southend, who could come and take your place while you are away, and that you are sure he'd keep his mouth shut, if he were well paid. Winton will have to consent to the arrangement if you persist. Then you'll send a telegram to me, as if I were your brother, asking me to come over to see you; and, when I come, you'll show me the telegram from Chelmsford, and ask me to take charge of the hulk while you go away to see your wife. I shall

come at night, so as not to be seen. I shall pretend to agree to your proposal, and then you can go ashore, and put up at my cottage, here, until I signal you to return. Do as I tell you, and play me fair, and I'll give you fifty pounds for yourself, when it's all over. What do you say?"

"Can't be done," he answered sullenly.

"Why not?"

"'Cos it can't."

"Very well. Good-night, then. I'm going straight from this house to the coastguard station, and shall send two armed men out to the hulk to arrest the murderer you've been harbouring, and two more to arrest you—you can't get far away in the meantime—for harbouring him, and for being an accessory after the fact. I suppose you know what the punishment for that offence is? And when you come out from prison you'll be a ruined man. The hulk-owners will in the meantime have discharged you, and without a character, for gross violation of rules."

He looked murder, and had he been less of a coward — as every bully is — might have attempted, as well as looked it. Then something seemed to occur to him, and he stood staring absently at me, while he was turning the matter over in his bovine brain. I guessed the upshot of his meditations to be somewhat

as follows: "This man, whoever he is, has me in his power, and can ruin me. I wish he were out of the way, but I don't mean risking my own neck for him. If I let him go on the hulk, Winton is more than likely to suspect he's a spy. In that case, he's just the sort of man to knock this meddling fool on the head, and the job I want done would get done, without my putting my neck in a noose."

Anyhow, he looked at me curiously for a minute, and then said in a more conciliatory tone:

"Wot are yer goin' to do to Winton?"

"Arrest him by-and-by. If I can, I'll keep your name out of it. If I can't, and you lose your crib, I'll make it up to you in some way. But let me tell you one thing—you'd better play me fair, or it will be the worse for you. The *Cuban Queen* is being watched, night and day, and if you tell Winton of your meeting with me, and he tries to escape, or you try to give us the slip yourself, you'll be instantly arrested, and it will go hard with you then. Play me fair, and I'll play you fair, and no harm need come to you at all in the matter.

"Once more, will you come to my terms? If not, I'm off to the coastguard station. There's only one policeman in Canvey, and I shall want two or three men—armed men—for

Winton, and the same for you. I mean business, I can tell you. Come, is it yes or no?"

"Yes," he said with a horrible oath. And then we sat down to arrange the details of our little conspiracy.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE JAWS OF THE LION

“**B**UT when you had satisfied yourself that there was a man in hiding on the *Cuban Queen*,” says the reader, “and when you had every reason to suspect that man to be Mullen, why not, at once, arrest him? Why go to work like Tom Sawyer in ‘Huckleberry Finn,’ who, when he wished to rescue Jim the nigger from the woodshed, must needs make a seven days’ job of it, and dig the poor wretch out, although it would have been an easy matter to abstract the key, and to let the man out through the door?”

Why? Well, for several reasons, one of which is that this story would then have been shorter, and perhaps less interesting. Another is that, though I had good cause to suppose the man in hiding to be James Mullen, I had no actual proof of his identity.

The reader must remember that I had seen the conspirator but twice in my life. The first time was in the train when I was going down

to Southend, and when my only cause for suspecting my fellow-traveller to be Mullen, was a fancied likeness to the published portrait. The second was on the day of the explosion at the Post Office. On that occasion he had been cleverly disguised, and we had not come to close quarters until after dark, when the difficulty of identification is greatly increased.

Had I, as matters then stood, given information to the police, I could only claim to have been the means of accomplishing his arrest, whereas if I could once obtain satisfactory proof of his identity, my chain of evidence would be complete. After having spent so much time, thought and money on the enterprise, I preferred to carry it through myself, rather than hand it over to some one else at the last moment.

By replacing Hughes for a time upon the *Cuban Queen*, I hoped to obtain the necessary evidence; and once such evidence was in my possession, I should be in a position to effect an arrest.

The morning after my interview with Hughes, I took train to Chelmsford, and thence despatched the pretended telegram from his wife. When I got back to Southend, the telegram, which Hughes was to send to his supposed brother, was awaiting me at the address we had arranged between us.

Lest the police should be tampering with letters and telegrams, I had instructed Hughes that his message was to contain nothing more than a request that Bill Hughes would come to see his brother Jim at Canvey.

To Canvey I accordingly went, calling first at my cottage, where I arrayed myself in a well-worn suit of waterman's clothes, which—lest I should at any time have to assume a disguise—I had kept there all along. My next procedure was to shave off the beard that I had been wearing on the night of the explosion at the Post Office.

That it was quite possible Mullen would recognise me in spite of my disguise, I fully realized, and I realized, too, that, in going on board the *Cuban Queen*, I was taking my life in my hands. But I flattered myself that I was more than his match in a fair fight, and in regard to foul play—well, fore-warned is fore-armed, and I was not unprepared.

It was dark before I started for the hulk. Hughes came on deck in reply to my hail, and proved a better actor than might have been expected. After he had inquired gruffly, "Is that you, Bill?" and I had responded, "Bill it is, Jim," and had been bidden come aboard, he went on—in response to my question of "Wot's up?"—to speak his part in the little play which we had rehearsed together. He

told me, as arranged, that he had received a telegram informing him that his wife was ill, and he then went on to say that he wished to go to her, but did not like applying for relief. The reason he assigned was that he had a "cove" on board, disguised as a woman (this in a lowered voice according to instructions), who had got into a scrape and wanted to lie low awhile.

My supposed brother then asked me if I would take charge of the hulk in his absence, assuring me that the "cove" was "a good un to pay," and that the job would be worth a five-pound note, if I promised to keep my mouth shut.

To all this Mullen was no doubt listening, so I replied—emphasising my remarks with the expectoration and expletives which might be looked for from a seafaring man—that I was ready to take over the job and to keep my own counsel. The point being thus satisfactorily settled, I was invited to step below, that I might make the acquaintance of the "cove" in the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIX

I TRY A FALL WITH JAMES MULLEN

THE occupant of the cabin was standing, facing the door and with his back to the stove, when I entered. He was dressed like a woman, and was whistling softly to himself while paring his nails with a pearl-handled knife.

"My brother Bill, sir," said Hughes gruffly, and I thought rather nervously, indicating me with the peaked cloth cap which he carried, rolled scrollwise, in his hand.

I followed suit with a bow, or rather a duck, and a polite "Good-evening, sir," but Mullen continued his nail-paring and whistling without deigning to look up.

About a quarter of a minute went by, during which I felt, and perhaps looked, rather foolish. Then Hughes said again—this time somewhat louder—"My brother, sir."

"There! there! my good fellow! That will do! I haven't become deaf! I hear you," Mullen answered, without raising his head.



"He was dressed like a woman and . . . paring his nails with a pearl-handled knife."

Captain Shannon.

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He spoke very much in the manner which is sometimes affected by curates. Each syllable was carefully pronounced, and the words fell as cleanly clipt from his lips as new shillings from the mint. The aspirates, the "hear" and "there" he discharged at us, as if from a popgun, and he cooed to us like any sucking dove when he came to the long vowel in "do."

But, for all his nicety of speech, he had, in his manner, too much of what is commonly called "side" to impress one favourably.

Your true aristocrat has, in his bearing towards strangers, a certain suave and urbane hauteur—as of one who expects and, if need be, will *exact* the courtesy he is accustomed to *accord*—which the man of no breeding thinks can be imitated by the assumption of "side."

Without his "side" such a man might conceivably have passed for a gentleman, whereas he now as surely betrays himself for what he is, as the man who, by manifesting that over-anxiety to please—which he mistakes for the easy courtesy of well-bred intercourse—betrays his under-breeding.

Hughes did not reply to Mullen, nor did the latter seem to expect a reply, for he looked critically at his little finger, felt the nail with the tip of his thumb, put the finger to his teeth, nibbled at it for an instant, and then began scraping the nail edge very gingerly.

Chafed at his insolence as I was, I could not help noticing how small, white, and beautifully shaped his hands were, and that he had the long taper fingers of the artist, and pink, carefully-trimmed nails.

When his task was completed to his satisfaction he closed the knife deliberately and put it on a little shelf by the bunk. Then darting a sudden sideways glance at me, he inquired sharply, almost viciously, "Well, sir, and what have you to say for yourself?"

It was the first time he had looked at me since I had entered the cabin, and, as I met his eye, it seemed to me that he started perceptibly, and that I saw a sudden dilatation of the pupil, which gave a look of consternation, if not of fear, to his face. The next moment he turned from me, and flashed at Hughes a look of such malignity that I fully expected to see the look succeeded by a blow—a look which, if I read it aright, was the portent of a terrible vengeance to the man who had played him false.

I am almost ashamed to write what followed. Not for the first time in my life—not for the first time in this enterprise—I acted as only one could act who was possessed by some spirit of mischief for his own undoing. Even to myself, the impulse which at times comes over me to play the fool—to say, at the critical

moment, the one word which ought to be left unsaid—is altogether unaccountable.

This uncertainty of conduct, this tendency to lose self-possession, and to bring tumbling about my ears—by the utterance of a word—the entire edifice which I have perhaps spent laborious months in building up, has been my trouble through life, and must inevitably stand in the way of my ever becoming a good detective.

But a good detective I have, as the reader knows, never claimed to be. Were it so, I should undoubtedly suppress the incident I am about to relate, for it tells very much against myself, without in any way strengthening the probability of my story.

When the man in hiding on the *Cuban Queen* lifted his head, and looked me in the face, I knew at once that I was in the presence, if not of James Mullen, at all events of the person with whom I had travelled to Southend, on the occasion when he had objected so forcibly to the striking of a fusee. The bright, prominent eyes, beautiful as a woman's, the delicately clear complexion, the straw-coloured hair, the aquiline nose with the strange upward arching of the nostrils, the curious knitting of the brows over the eyes, the full lips that spoke of voluptuousness, unscrupulous and cruel, the firm, finely-moulded chin—all these there was

no mistaking, in spite of his woman's dress. As I looked at him, the scene in the stuffy smoking carriage on the Southend railway came back to me, and when, in his quick, incisive way, he asked, "Well, sir, and what have you to say for yourself?" I stammered foolishly for a moment, and then—prompted by what spirit of perversity and mischief I know not—answered him by another question, which, under the circumstances, must have sounded like intentional insolence.

"You're the man wot couldn't stand the smell of fuseses."

Had horns suddenly sprouted out on each side of my head, he could not have looked at me with more absolute amazement and dismay. For a very few seconds he stared wide-eyed with wonder, and then a look of comprehension and cunning crept into his eyes. They narrowed, cat-like and cruel, the muscles about the cheeks tightened, the lips parted, showing the clenched teeth; I heard his breath coming and going like that of a winded runner, and then his face flamed out with a look of such devilish ferocity and uncontrollable fury as I pray God I may never see on face of man again.

With a howl of hatred more horrible than that of any tiger,—for no wild beast is half so hellish in its cruelty as your human tiger,—he sprang at me, beating at my face—now with

closed fist, now open-handed and with clutching tearing nails—kicking with his feet, biting and snapping at my hands and throat like a dog, and screaming like a very madman.

To this day it consoles me not a little for the lapse of self-possession, which I had just before manifested, to think that I never lost presence of mind during this onslaught. When he came at me, my one thought was to see that he made use of no weapons. His wild-cat clawing and scratching, it was no difficult matter for any one, with a cool head and a quick eye, to ward off; but when I saw him clap his hand to his hip, where, had he been wearing male clothing, a pistol or knife might well have lain, the eye I kept upon him was, I promise you, a keen one.

On finding no pocket at his hips, he was reminded, no doubt, of his woman's dress, for his hand slipped down to the side of his skirt, where it floundered about as helplessly as a fish out of water.

A woman's pocket is, to the degenerate male mind, a fearful and wonderful piece of mechanism. The intention of the designer was apparently to offer special inducements to pickpockets, and so to construct the opening that the contents should either fall out altogether and be lost, or should be swallowed up into dark and mysterious depths which no male

world between his presence on board the hulk being discovered by the police, as the result of a brawl, and his being arrested on information given by me, and supported by proof of his identity.

Mullen was the first to speak, being now no doubt convinced that he had not acted with his customary discretion. His reasons for wishing to avoid a visit from the police were even stronger than mine. So long as it was a question of brains, he might yet hold his own, but let him once fall into their hands, and he would be hopelessly outnumbered, whereas in me he was pitted against a single foe whom it might not be difficult to outwit.

"I beg your pardon for what happened just now," he said ; "but first of all tell me where and when I have seen you before."

"I saw you in the Southend train once. You 'ad a row with a bloke wot stunk the carriage out with a fusee," I answered, doing my best to sustain the *rôle* I had assumed.

"Ah!" he said, looking very much relieved and with a wonderfully pleasant smile, "that explains everything. To tell the honest truth, my good man, I knew I had seen you before, the moment I set eyes on you, and the fact is I thought you were a detective who has been hunting me down for a long time, and who has played me one or two tricks too

dirty and too cowardly even for a detective to play, and for which one day I mean to be even with him."

He was smiling still, but the smile seemed to have shifted from his eyes to his teeth, and the effect had ceased to be pleasant. He swung himself round, and away from me, and with hands clasped behind him and bent head, commenced pacing backward and forward—evidently deep in thought—in the scanty space the cabin afforded.

Five minutes went by in silence, and then he began to mutter to himself in a low voice, turning his head from side to side, every now and then, in a quick, nervous, bird-like way, his eyes never still a moment, but darting restlessly from object to object.

"What's come to me!" he said to himself—and there was a look on his face which I have never seen except on the face of a madman, as indeed I am now fully persuaded he was—"What's come to me, that I, of all men in the world, should so forget myself as to behave (and before two louts) like a drunken, screeching, hysterical Jezebel?"

For a moment he stopped his restless pacing, and it seemed as if the man were writhing in actual physical pain under his self-contempt—as if every word had been a lash cutting ribbons of flesh from his bare back.

Once more he fell to walking to and fro while holding converse with himself.

"Is the end coming that I can break down like this?" he asked. "No, no, it's this being hunted down day and night, until I get to start at my own shadow, that has made me nervous and overwrought.

"Nervous! Overwrought! My God! who wouldn't be so who'd led the life I've led these last six months—hearing the step of the officer who has come to arrest me in every sound I hear in the daytime, and lying wide-eyed and wakeful the whole night through, rather than trust myself to the sleep which brings always the same hideous dream, from which I awake screaming, and with the cold sweat running off me like water!"

It was a magnificent piece of acting, if acting it were, and there was a pathetic break in his voice at the last, which, had he not been what he was, would have made me pity him.

But James Mullen, *alias* Captain Shannon, was scarcely an object for pity, as I was soon reminded, for, as he looked up, my eye met his, and he read there, I suppose, something of what was passing through my mind. To such a man's vanity the mere thought of being considered a possible object for pity is unendurable. It implies a consciousness of superiority which is resented more fiercely than

an insult or a wrong. For one moment I thought that he was about to attack me again, not this time with tooth and nail, after the manner of a wild cat or a hysterical woman, but with a heavy three-legged stool which was lying upon the bunk—tossed there, I suppose, by Hughes, to be out of the way while he was clearing up.

Without taking his eyes from mine, Mullen turned the edge of a glance toward it. I saw his hand flutter up hesitatingly for a moment like a startled bird, and then drop dead to his side, but I knew that he was thinking how dearly, if he dared, he would love to beat the stool again and again against my face, until he had bashed every feature out of recognition. On this occasion, however, he managed to keep his self-control, and contented himself by asking me, with savage irritability, what I was waiting for, and what I saw strange in him that I stood staring in that way.

I replied that I was only waiting to know whether he had anything else to say to me, or to my brother before the latter left the hulk.

He did not answer, except to snap out "You can go" to Hughes. When, after a surly "Good-night both," that worthy had taken his departure, Mullen turned to me again.

"Now listen. I'm a dangerous man to trifle with, and a desperate one, and there are not

many things I'd stick at to be level with the man who played me false. But I can be a good friend to those who play me fair, as well as a relentless enemy to those who do the other thing. Act squarely by me while you are here, and keep your mouth shut when you leave, and you'll never have cause to regret it. But if you play tricks here, or blab when you're gone, you'll have done the worst day's work for yourself you ever did in your life. Do you understand ? ”

He waited for a reply, so I nodded, and remarked, “Fair do is fair do, guv'nor.”

“Very well,” he continued ; “ now we understand each other, and no more need be said about it. I shall sleep in the hold, as I've done before. If for any reason any one came out to the hulk, it wouldn't do for them to see me. You'll take your nap here, as your brother did. So I bid you good-night.”

“Good-night, sir,” I answered civilly, holding the door open for him.

“Now I'll have a look at the paper that fell out of your pocket in the tussle, my friend,” I said to myself when he was out of hearing. “I've got all the night before me ; for I don't intend, until I've got you safe in custody, to take the nap of which you were speaking. Otherwise it might be a nap to which for me there would come no waking.

CHAPTER XXX

MORE DEVILRY

THERE was no fastening to the door of my cabin, but on passing my hand over the place where a fastening might have been expected, a flake of soft substance caught in my finger nail and dropped to the floor. This, when I picked it up, proved to be a pellet of bread, which had been kneaded to the consistency of putty or dough. Taking the swing lamp from its bracket, I examined the door more closely, and saw that there had once been a bolt of some sort. A closer examination convinced me that the person who had removed the bolt had been at the pains of plugging, with kneaded bread, the screw holes which had been left empty by the bolt's removal. After doing so he had apparently rubbed dirt-smeared fingers over the place where the bolt had been, so that the newly exposed surface might not look cleaner than the rest of the door.

Very softly I opened the door and looked at the other side, where, as I expected, I found a bolt. A moment's examination satisfied me

to humour a troublesome child to whom she tosses a toy to stay its crying. By sending us—what you dare not insult the Scotch by sending to Scotland—a sawdust figure, of which you hold the strings, a viceroy who is to play at being king and holding court to please us. But we—ah, God! was ever so unreasonable a people?—we do not simper and dance to the fiddling of this dummy king, who is not even of our own choosing, for we are ungracious enough to remember that we have, in our midst, men of older lineage and nobler blood than he.

“And then you cast about in your mind for some other means by which you can make us loyal under subjection. And when there is born to that ‘Queen of Ireland’ whom Ireland never sees—though she can journey far afield to southern France or Italy—another princeling, for whom royal provision must be made out of the pockets of the people, who can scarce find their own children in bread, you say, ‘Go to, here is our opportunity. We will make Ireland loyal for ever by giving this princeling the name of Patrick as one of his many names, and by dubbing him Duke of Con-naught.’

“But Ireland, graceless, thankless, stubborn Ireland, is not one whit more loyal after receiving this royal boon, for she knows that you

rule over her by the coward's right—the right of the strong to oppress and to make subject the weak.

“You call her your sister while you seek to make her your slave, even as you call Irishmen your brothers, while you have sought to make their very name a reproach and a fitting subject for your sorry jests.

“You hold Ireland in the thrall of cruel oppression—for cowardice is always cruel—not because of any sisterly feeling for her or love for her people, whom you hate and who hate you with an undying hate, but because you *are afraid to let her go free*.

“But that which you fear shall assuredly come to pass, and Ireland, which might and would have been your friend and ally were she free, is but waiting till you are involved in war to prove herself your deadliest and bitterest enemy, and the friend and ally of every country which calls itself your foe.

“By order.

“CAPTAIN SHANNON.”

No more convincing proof that the fugitive in hiding on the *Cuban Queen* was Captain Shannon could be wished for than this document, and the only question I had to consider was how best to accomplish his arrest.

I decided that the safest plan would be to

signal that Hughes was to return. He could see the hulk from the top window of the cottage, where I had instructed him to instal himself; and I had arranged with him that a red jersey (the men in charge of the hulks wear red jerseys not unlike those affected by the Salvationists) slung over the ship's side was to be taken as meaning, "Come back as soon as it is dark, and say that your wife is better."

His return would, of course, render my presence on the hulk unnecessary, and there would be nothing further for me to do but to receive whatever payment Mullen proposed to give me, wish him and my supposed brother good-bye, and come ashore. There I should make straight for the coastguard station, and should inform the officer in charge that the notorious Captain Shannon was at that moment in hiding, disguised as a woman, on the *Cuban Queen*. The rest would be easy, for I had hit upon a plan by which, providing that I could count upon the necessary assistance at the proper moment, the fugitive could be secured without difficulty or danger, and I saw no reason why the newspaper placards of the morning after Hughes's return should not bear the startling announcement, "Arrest of Captain Shannon."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ARREST OF CAPTAIN SHANNON

SIX o'clock next morning saw the red jersey, which was to recall Hughes, slung over the ship's side, and the preconcerted reply signalled from the upper window of the cottage.

From then until nightfall I had to possess my soul in patience, and never in my life has time hung so heavily on my hands as on that eventful day.

Mullen, who had been up since daybreak, was watching the shipping with the liveliest interest. By standing on the steps of the cockpit he could, without being seen himself, get a distant view of every vessel that passed up or down the great water-way of the Thames.

He was inclined to be friendly, not to say talkative, and only once was there a recurrence of the irritability which he had manifested on the previous evening. It happened in this wise.

Some fishing lines were in the cabin, and being badly in want of an occupation to make the time pass, I baited the hooks with shreds

of raw herring and threw the lines over the ship's side. I got a "bite" directly, but, on hauling up, I found that it came from a crab about as big as a five-shilling piece. Him I tenderly detached from the inhospitable hook and restored to his native element, after which I rebaited, sent the lead whizzing overboard, and again brought up a crab.

"Come to look for the other one, I suppose," I said to myself. "His wife, perhaps. I'll treat her kindly," and crab Number Two rejoined its dear ones.

Again I rebaited, again there was a bite, and again a crab, clawing wildly at the air, appeared at the end of the line.

"H'm — a sister this time, or perhaps a daughter," I remarked. "Back she goes, however," and crab Number Three popped safely overboard, only to be succeeded by crab Number Four.

"These are Scotch crabs, I should think," I grumbled, "they're so clannish"; but this one too I sent on his way rejoicing. Then a fifth appeared on the scene.

"Oh, hang it all!" I growled. "I shall get no fish at all if the crabs eat up my bait as fast as I put it on. I hoped that last was an orphan, but it seems as if I had struck another family gathering."

Crab Number Six added insult to injury by

refusing to relinquish the bait, though I turned him over on his back, and shook him till he rattled.

"Oh, I can't stand this," I said, raising a menacing heel. But more humane feeling prevailed, and once more I stooped to assist the pertinacious crustacean to his native deep. A nip from his foreclaws was all I got for my pains.

"Very well," I said, "if you *will* have it, you will."

Down came the heel, there was a sickening scrunch, and what had been a crab was a gruesome mess.

There was an exclamation of disgust, and looking guilty over my shoulder, I saw that Mullen—who had hitherto been too absorbed in his occupation of watching the shipping to interest himself in my fishing—had heard the scrunch of the crab's shell under my heel, and had turned to ascertain the cause.

"You brute!" he said. "Why couldn't you throw the wretched thing back into the water?"

"It ain't none of your business," I answered sulkily.

"It is my business, and every decent person's business. The thing never did you any harm. Besides, look at the ghastly mess you've made,"

"Ain't you never killed nothin' wot done you no 'arm?" I asked, perhaps indiscreetly.

"Yes, if I had any reason to do so: just as I'd gladly put my heel on your ugly brute's head and crush the life out of you, as you've crushed it out of that wretched crab. But not from wanton destructiveness."

I thought it unwise to prolong an argument which touched upon such delicate and personal ground, so I continued my fishing in silence, and, after another exclamation of disgust, Mullen turned away to devote himself once more to the shipping.

Not a vessel went by that he did not scrutinize carefully, and I noticed that when a small steamer appeared on the horizon, he fidgeted restlessly until she was near enough to allow inspection. I felt sure that he was on the lookout for a ship, or for a signal from a ship, and I was inclined to think that the irritability he had displayed was due more to nerve tension and to disappointment than to any other cause. That he was breaking down under the strain, and was no longer the man he had been, was made manifest later on in the day when a large steam yacht came into sight at the mouth of the Thames. All his attention was at once riveted upon her, and as she crept up the river, towards us, I could see that he was becoming feverishly anxious.

"There's a pair of field-glasses in the hold where I am sleeping," he said. "Would you mind getting them for me, like a good fellow? Some one might see me if I crossed the deck myself. I want to have a look at yonder big liner that's going down the river. I fancy I sailed in her once."

I obeyed, and he made a pretence of examining the liner.

"Yes, it is she: I can read her name quite easily," he said, turning the glasses from the big ship to the steam yacht. His hand trembled so that for a moment he was unable to fix the focus, and I distinctly saw the quick fluttering of his pulse in the veins at the wrist."

"What *is* her name?" I asked.

"*Fiona*," he said absently, and then, suddenly conscious of the slip, he corrected himself with a jerk: "I mean the *Walmer Castle*, of course. I sailed in her when I went to Peru."

I had from the first suspected that it was for his sister's boat *Fiona* that Mullen was watching, but I never anticipated that he would tell me so himself. That such a man—a man who had carried out his devilish plots as if his heart had been of cold stone and his nerves of iron—should so "give himself away," as the phrase goes, was proof positive of his complete breakdown.

He watched the steam yacht until she was

level with us, and then, having apparently satisfied himself of her identity, he laid the glasses down with a sigh of relief, and went below. As soon as he was out of sight I snatched them up, and turning them upon the now receding vessel, saw, as I had expected, the word *Fiona* on her bow.

The plot was thickening indeed, for it was no doubt by Mullen's directions that the yacht had come to England, and he was not likely to have sent for her until the fitting moment to escape had arrived. I had barely time to satisfy myself of the vessel's identity, and to lay down the glasses, before Mullen reappeared in the cockpit, on the edge of which I was sitting. He was munching bread and cheese, of which he must have been sorely in need, for he had had no food since early morning.

Every shadow of his nervousness was now gone, and he was in the best of spirits.

"Hughes, my boy," he said boisterously, slapping me on the knee, "how are you getting on? And what are you going to do with all the fish you have caught, eh?"

I had too much to think of to wish to enter into conversation, and as I had caught no fish—as he very well knew—I pretended to take the last remark in high dudgeon, and gave him a sulky answer.

But the reaction from his former anxiety was

so great, and so set was he upon being friendly, that in order to get rid of him I said that I wanted some tea, and went below.

"That's right; make yourself jolly, my good man. You're going to do well out of this job, I can tell you," he chuckled. "And as it's beginning to get a bit dark, and I don't see any one about, I'll go on deck to stretch my legs, and get an airing."

He remained there until night had set in, and then he joined me in the cabin.

"I say," he said nervously, "there's a boat coming out to us. Who can it be at this hour?"

"Most likely it's Jim come back," I answered gruffly. "'E said 'e'd come as soon as the missus was better."

"Of course," Mullen said pleasantly and with evident relief. "How foolish of me not to think of it! I'm glad the poor fellow's wife is better. But I shall be sorry to lose your entertaining companionship, my genial friend. *Can't* I persuade you to stay on, as my guest, and favour me with the pleasure of your company for a day or two longer?"

"Guest be blowed!" I replied in my surliest tone. "If that's Jim come back, the sooner I 'as my money, and gets ashore agen, the better I'll like it."

"I should be hurt if I thought you meant that," he said banteringly; "but I know you

don't. We've hit it off together charmingly, I'm sure, notwithstanding the fact that I'm so 'difficult' socially. And I'd made such delightful plans for your comfort and amusement. It seems hard that we should have to part."

Before I could answer, and not a little to my relief, we heard a voice which was unmistakably that of Hughes, for he was expressing, by means of a liberal use of his favourite adjective, the unwillingness with which he set eyes on "the — old tub again."

"Well," said Mullen, when the hulk-keeper entered the cabin, "and how's your wife?"

"Better," was the answer.

"Ah, that's capital. I congratulate you, I'm sure. So glad to see you back again. Except, of course, for the fact that we shall be deprived of your brother's company. He *is* your brother you said, didn't you? Though really one need hardly ask: the likeness, I'm sure, is wonderful. But what a delightful creature it is, Hughes! Such geniality, such urbanity, such a flow of spirits, such a fund of information, and, above all, such manners!"

Hughes, who had probably never seen Mullen in this vein before, looked first at him, and then at me, in astonishment.

"Stow your jaw!" I said shortly. "If you're going to pay me for the job, pay me, and let me go."

"Certainly, certainly, my dear fellow," replied Mullen, smiling. "Yes, you and I *have* a little account to settle, haven't we? I'll pay you, by all means. I always do pay my debts, and with interest. First, about the hulk."

He had been standing by the door, but now came forward, and counted out ten sovereigns upon the table.

"Will that satisfy you, and keep your mouth shut?" he asked, stepping back again.

I nodded.

"Put them in your pocket, then, and that matter's settled."

I stooped to pick up the coins, but, as I did so, Mullen suddenly pushed me with all his strength against Hughes, knocking that worthy and myself backward upon the bunk.

Before I could recover myself he was out of the cabin, and had pulled the door to with a bang. Then we heard the sound of a bolt being shot into its socket.

Hughes hurled me aside, and sprang up with blazing eyes.

"Wos it you as took the bolt off and put it outside?" he yelled.

"No."

"Then 'e's done it, and 'e means mischief, an' no mistake!" he shouted. "The ——'s bad enough for anythink. I know 'im; and 'ere we are caught like rats in a —— trap."

"That's all right," I said, and hunching my shoulder to the door, I burst the thing open with a crash, the screws starting from their sockets, and pattering upon an opposite locker like spent bullets.

Hughes seized the opportunity to rush past me and upon the deck, whither I followed him. Nor were we too soon, for Mullen was making, as Hughes had evidently feared, for the dynamite hold. When he heard our footsteps, he turned, and, whipping out a revolver, raised it, and shot Hughes through the heart. The unhappy man flung up his arms, and toppled over the ship's side into the sea, but before Mullen could turn the weapon upon me I got in a blow straight from the shoulder. It took him well under the chin and tumbled him backward to the bottom of the hold. I hit hard enough to have knocked him "silly," and I was not surprised that he lay for a minute or two like one dead. Then he tried to rise, but fell back with a groan, apparently quite helpless.

"Are you hurt?" I inquired, dropping on one knee, the better to look down into the hold.

He glanced up with a feeble attempt at a smile upon features cruelly contorted by pain.

"So you've won the rubber, after all, have you?" he said, "and in spite of my having arranged everything so cleverly, as I thought. You and Hughes, once locked securely in the



"I got in a blow straight from the shoulder."
Captain Shannon.

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cabin, and a fuse put to the dynamite, I ought by now to have been a quarter of a mile off in the dinghy, on my way to join my sister at Gravesend. The yacht could have slipped off quietly in the confusion, for no one would know that the explosion here hadn't occurred, as explosions have occurred before, through the carelessness of the man in charge. And you and Hughes, the only two people who could set matters right, would have gone to join the dead men who tell no tales. Confess now, wasn't it a pretty plan, and one worthy of an artist, friend Rissler?"

I started at the mention of my name, seeing which he burst into a mocking laugh.

"Is it possible? No, it can't be!" he said. "Don't tell me that you didn't know that I knew who you were! Why, you refreshing person, it was only because I did know, that I pretended to fall into your booby's trap. I only let you take Hughes's place on board the hulk so that I might get you into my power, and might rid myself of the pair of you at a sweep.

"And to think that you didn't know that I knew! Why, man alive, I've known all about you from the first, and I could have sent you to join Quickly and Green long ago if I had minded. But they were mere bunglers, fit only to put out of the way, just as one would tread

upon a spider or beetle. Whereas you're really clever, and ingenious, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, and you interested me. That's why I spared you until now.

"I don't say that if you had had any one you were very fond of—a wife, a sweetheart or a child—that something unfortunate might not have happened to that particular person, just to let you know that I was keeping you in mind. But I fancy you are too mean a scoundrel ever to let yourself get fond of any one in this world.

"Once or twice you played your cards quite prettily; but, oh, how you bungled them at others! Still, I might have expected that from your books. What could be worse of their sort than they are? I've read them all, don't you know, though how I endured it I can't think. There is one thing, though, that I could not endure, and that is that you should write a book about *me*. Spare me that last indignity, and I'll forgive you the brutal, blackguardly, costermonger blows you struck me behind the Post Office."

His eyes shone wickedly as he spoke, but there was such a look of fiendish triumph on his face that I asked myself for the first time (I had been too fascinated by the man to think of it before), whether he might not have some motive in thus putting himself to the trouble of talking to me at a moment when he was, as I could see, suffering keen physical pain.

What could his motive be?

For answer there came, from the space where the dynamite was stored, a tiny splutter, not unlike the sound which is made by a badly trimmed lamp.

We had *not*, after all, been in time to prevent him from carrying out his devilish purpose! And I—blind fool that I was—had been listening idly to his chatter, never suspecting that every word which fell from his lips was a link in the chain by which he sought to hold me to a terrible fate!

This was why he had forced himself to smile and wear a mask, was it?

But the mask was off now, for, catching sight of the horror in my face as I leapt to my feet, he raised himself on his arm and glared at me with a countenance contorted out of all human likeness by devilish hate and exultation.

"You're too late, you ——!" he shrieked. "You're too late! We're going to hell together, and if there's a still deeper hell there, I'll seize you with a grip you can't shake off and leap with you into the eternal fire. You shan't escape me there any more than you have here. We'll burn together! You're too late! you're too ——"

His voice died away in the distance, for I was by this time in the dinghy and rowing as man never rowed before.

Thank God I was now a hundred yards away—two hundred—three hundred—a quarter of a mile.

Suddenly sea and sky seemed to open in one sheet of purple flame before me, and I was knocked backward out of the boat as if by a blow from a clenched fist. Then I felt as if the sea had picked me up in her great arms—as I had once seen a drink-maddened man pick up a child whom he afterwards dashed head foremost against a wall—and had flung me away and away, over the very world's edge.

* * * * *

When I came to myself I was lying high and dry upon the Kentish coast, carried thither, no doubt, by the huge wave that had followed the explosion.

Captain Shannon had been arrested at last, and by an officer who, for your crimes and mine, reader—be they few or many, trivial or great—is now hunting each of us down to bring us to justice.

That detective—Detective Death—there is no eluding; and one day he will lay his hand upon your shoulder and upon mine, and will say, "Come."

And we shall have to go.

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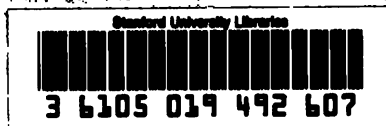
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